

Preview Test: MG-C

Instead of being the hoped for all-new car it's simply an evolutionary model—one that points out the danger of inbreeding.

Once you've set everything in motion by taking a step from "A" to "B" the logical progression is to "C" right? No it isn't, it's to "H." MG may call its new car an MG-C, but "H" stands for Healey, and in the case of the MG-C, which uses a modified version of the Healey 6-cylinder engine, "H" also stands for heartburn. The thing doesn't work very well.

The idea of an MG-B with more guts is appealing just as the idea of almost anything with more guts is appealing—except perhaps the chicken you're about to have for dinner. Private owners have often made virile MG-Bs a reality by super tuning or engine swaps. Unfortunately, MG decided to try the same thing in the MG-C and the job was botched. By stuffing the great cast-iron Austin-Healey 3000 engine into a cringing MG-B chassis, they've managed to destroy most of the good features of the B without appreciably improving performance. Considering the amount of work involved, it puts one to wondering why MG bothered.

It wasn't a casual exercise by any means. In order to make the A-H in-line Six fit, the engine had to be lowered and shortened—(that meant using seven little main bearings instead of five big ones) although bore and stroke remain the same (3.28 x 3.50 in.); a different gearbox was designed, and a longitudinal torsion bar front suspension replaced the B's coil springs. While all this seems like a fairly elaborate procedure to go through just to exchange the venerable Four for the equally venerable Six, once the decision was made it was an option of going this route or hacking away massive amounts of passenger space to accommodate the long, long Healey engine. Still, even by reducing both the height and length of the Healey unit, things are far from ideal. Because of the massive hood bulge, the MG-C looks like a standard MG-B with a bad case of the mumps, handling is sloppy, and acceleration is only slightly improved.

Depending on which piece of publicity material you read, the MG-C engine is rated at 145 hp at 5200 rpm or 150 hp at 5250, which is the same as provided by the Six in Healey 3000 form. Since the old 4-cylinder MG-B engine is rated at 95 hp, either figure is near enough to a 50% increase to make you think that performance is going to be out of sight. But remember, if you will, that the MG-B engine weighs 350 lbs. while this new brute tips the scales at 560. Even with sus-



PHOTOGRAPHY: MIKE TWITE

pension modifications you don't have to be Colin Chapman to figure out that something is going to be lost in the handling department and that much of that new-found power is going to be used up towing around the extra weight—or more accurately, pushing it around, or more accurately still, pushing it straight ahead since the big trouble with the beak-heavy MG-C is trying to get it to go

around anything.

The car was tested in England and was innocent of any of the U.S. required anti-smog equipment (different intake and exhaust manifolds, "sealed" carburetors, air pump, and a different spark advance curve). Our test car turned the quarter in 17.6 seconds at a speed of 80 mph, while a stock-as-a-stove MG-B recorded 18.5 @ 74 mph—not much

of a difference for the penalties you pay.

In addition to the engine modifications, several other items will have to be changed on the export model. For instance, the entire dashboard will be recessed and surrounded by a heavily padded rim and the plastic knobs and toggle-type switches used on the domestic models will be replaced by soft rubber versions in order to meet U.S. safety standards dealing with "second impact." The exterior of the export models will also become more cluttered up thanks to the mandatory installation of side-marker lights and reflectors.

While the MG-C is faster, the overall impression is that it's . . . well, lethargic. It's smooth and powerful so long as you're not interested in quick response, but once you shove down on the throttle, expecting a sudden surge of power, everything dies—that big anchor isn't about to pick up rpm quickly no matter how much you kick the throttle. There were glory years when the Healey was a real racer—even with the 6-cylinder engine (though the best of the line was the all-aluminum 4-banger 100S). And there were more recent glory years as a race car for the MG-B—one of which catapulted Ron Bucknum straight into the seat of a Formula One Honda. With the MG-C it's hard to tell which is the more embarrassed about the curious position in life it has achieved; the Healey engine or the MG chassis.

Perhaps the only good thing to come out of the MG-C is the new 4-speed gearbox. It's a brand new unit (the only all-new component in the car) complete with a synchronized first gear. Yes, Virginia, a *synchronized first* on an MG. The throws are very short, very positive and it's impossible to beat the synchromesh into any gear. On top of that, it's the first MG transmission in history that doesn't sound like an air raid siren whenever things start moving quickly. We also tried an MG-C/GT equipped with a 3-speed Borg-Warner automatic transmission. This option is intended primarily for the luxury/convenience-oriented American market—at least that's what MG's PR-types told us. Between adding extra weight and robbing horsepower, the performance of the automatic version was noticeably less than a standard MG-B.

Surprisingly, despite a fairly radical redesign of the front suspension (similar in concept to the Jaguar XK-E front suspension), the ride is much the same as that of the B—
(Continued on page 117)

MG-C	CHECK LIST
VEHICLE TYPE Front-engine, rear-wheel-drive, 2-passenger sports car	ENGINE Starting.....Fair Response.....Fair Noise.....Good Service accessibility.....Very Good
ENGINE Type: water-cooled, 6 in-line, cast iron block and head Bore x stroke.....3.28 x 3.50 in 83.4 x 88.9 mm Displacement.....177.7 cu in, 2.912 cc Compression ratio.....9.0 to one Carburetion.....2 x 1-bbl SU HS6 Valve gear.....Pushrod operated overhead valves Power.....145 bhp @ 5200 rpm Torque.....174 lbs/ft @ 3500 rpm Max. recommended engine speed. 5500 rpm	DRIVE TRAIN Shift linkage.....Very Good Synchro action.....Very Good
DRIVE TRAIN Transmission.....4-speed all-synchro Final drive ratio.....3.31 to one	STEERING Effort.....Fair Response.....Good
SUSPENSION F: Ind., unequal length wishbones, torsion bars, anti-sway bar R:.....Rigid axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs	SUSPENSION Ride comfort.....Good Roll resistance.....Fair Cornering ability.....Good Predictability.....Good
BRAKES F:.....11.0-in Girling disc, vacuum assist R: 9.0 x 2.5-in Girling drum, vacuum assist Swept area.....353.4 sq in	BRAKES Fade resistance.....Very Good Directional stability.....Very Good
WHEELS AND TIRES Wheel size and type.....15 x 5.0-in stamped steel Tire make, size and type... Dunlop 165 R 15, SP-41 radial ply, tube type	INTERIOR Ease of entry exit.....Fair Front seating comfort.....Fair Rear seating comfort.....— Driver controls.....Very Good Instrument comprehensiveness...Very Good Instrument legibility.....Good Heater/defroster.....Good Ventilation.....Poor
STEERING Type.....Rack and Pinion Turns lock-to-lock.....3.5 Turning circle.....36 ft	CONVENIENCE AND PROTECTION Trunk space.....Good Interior storage space.....Poor Bumper protection.....Fair Visibility.....Fair Wiper effectiveness.....Good
DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES Wheelbase.....91.0 in Track.....F: 50.0 R: 49.5 in Length.....153.2 in Width.....60 in Height.....50 in Curb weight.....2445 lbs Weight distribution.....56.0/44.0% F/R Fuel capacity.....14.4 gal Oil capacity.....7.7 qts Water capacity.....11.1 qts	CONSTRUCTION QUALITY Sheet metal.....Good Paint.....Good Upholstery.....Good
PERFORMANCE* Zero to.....Seconds 40 mph.....5.3 60 mph.....10.5 80 mph.....17.6 Standing 1/4-mile.....17.6 sec @ 80.0 mph *Performance figures for cars sold in the United States may vary due to installation of mandatory anti-smog equipment	



FORD CORTINA 1600 GT

(Continued from page 72)

we see interesting variations in safety belt design. Most American cars use two separate belts—one for lap and one for shoulder. The Japanese favor a detachable shoulder belt. The Cortina uses just one strap with a sliding buckle to equalize tension between the lap and shoulder sections. The disadvantage with this system is that it puts the wearer in an all-or-none situation rather than allowing him an option of choosing the lap belt only.

Have we managed to say yet that the Cortina is a British car? Whenever we try to describe it we come back to that statement. It has some endearing characteristics, we loved to flog it because it feels strong and responsive although it never gives the impression of being a precision machine. The engine and drive train are very noisy contributing to a high background noise level at cruising speeds, the ride is quite harsh, particularly when we discovered that ride comfort hasn't been traded for good handling. Light cars normally have poor resistance to crosswinds and the Cortina is light and substandard for its weight.

Most of all, though, we were impressed with the GT's performance. The car is quick for a sedan of its displacement and price, almost as good as a BMW 1600 with a \$350 less imposing list price. We're left with the conclusion that the Cortina GT is a hard-nosed little flogger car, and to hell with everything else. That's no bad thing to be. ●

PREVIEW TEST: MG-C

(Continued from page 93)

at least on straight, smooth roads. Unfortunately, when it comes time to get the C around a corner, you discover that it is all flabby and soggy. On fast curves, it feels like the B—with a great deal more body roll—while on slow bends the understeer really sets in and you have to haul on the wheel like the helmsman on the Cutty Sark in a hurricane.

Wheel rim size has gone up from 14 to 15 inches, and fatter radial ply tires are fitted. All this in conjunction with the extra weight of the engine makes steering ultra heavy.

In order to overcome some of the problem the steering ratio has been lowered. It now takes 3.5 turns, lock-to-lock, instead of three, which may help steering effort somewhat but definitely worsens controllability. Also in order to combat the extra weight up front, power-assisted 11-inch disc brakes replace the 10.7-inch MG-B discs and wider drums are used at the rear.

All in all the MG-C isn't an improvement of the B and it will very likely be a disappointment to MG fans who were expecting an all-new chassis and powerplant. Instead it's an evolutionary model that should point out once and for all the dangers of inbreeding.

On the other hand, somewhere deep within the MG works is a B with the 2.5-liter Coventry-Climax V-8. . . . —Mike Twite

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