



*1936 MG SA saloon*

## **The Big Prewar MGs - The SA, VA, and WA**

By Geoffrey Wheatley

I would not like to guess how many words have been written about MGs over the years, certainly millions or even trillions, perhaps even more!

However, there are some vehicles that came out of the Abingdon factory that only share a fraction of the MG story. We all know about the postwar boom with the TC ..TD and TF and who can forget the sporting image of the MGA and the very attractive MGB who's appeal lasted almost eighteen years, a record for any British car.

However, between 1936 and 1939 resulting from the internal change of policy at the Abingdon factory a unique range of luxury cars were produced that completely changed the image of MG if only for a brief period of motor history, starting with the MG. SA launched in the fall of 1935/36. Was this Morris Motors putting a slender foot into the luxury market knowing that if it failed Cowley would not get a blast from Billy Morris who was always watching the pennies and of course the profit?

The response at the 1935 Motor Show was more than encouraging especially when we remember that until then the company had not been associated with the production of large luxury vehicles designed to appeal to a small but obviously affluent section of the motoring public. The fact that the Abingdon operation had been taken over by Morris Motors Cowley and was no longer an independent operation certainly had something to do with this additional range of vehicles.

Morris did have the Wolsley range which was certainly a quality vehicle, but never elegant or sporty as illustrated by the fact that Nuffield owned a Wosley for many years while his wife, Lady Nuffield, sported a Rolls and a Bentley at their country home. The power unit for the 1936 SA was a modified Morris 2 liter engine not exactly a prestige power unit but reliable and not expensive to maintain.

However, these modifications cause some delay in meeting the orders from the 1935 Motor Show, in fact some purchasers waited as long as six months for their car which did not exactly embellish the new image of the MG SA. To add salt to the situation the 2.5 liter SS Jaguar produced by William Lyons was equally elegant in style & design and 20% less expensive than the SA.

Not as fast however, with even with a 2.5 liter engine made under contract for Jaguar by the Standard Motor Company, a leading supplier of engines to about 60% of the British motor industry. (Remembered today as the company that saved Ferguson Tractors when Ford stopped making their engines after WWII. That's another story for another time!

Side by side there was little to chose between the SA and the Jaguar, both extremely attractive in design and style that today we associate with the rich and famous on their yachts in Monte Carlo in the prewar era. Once the production had been sorted out at Abingdon and Cowley was able to supply the important things like an engine and chassis the SA did fairly well within its limited market. However, with Jaguar offering a similar package priced at just over three hundred pounds against the SA priced at over four hundred, the fact that the SA was about ten miles faster was not a big selling point for the extra money. (Below 1936 MG SA tourer)



It is also interesting to note that the name Jaguar was not used until this time and was not registered as the official company name until 1946. The company name was SS, short for Swallow Sidecars Ltd. It was only after the war when the term S.S. was not exactly an asset to any manufacturer that the Jaguar Motor Car Co. came into existence. (Below: 1939 MG WA DHC & 1936 MG SA Keller replica.)



(Below: 1939 MG WA Saloon & 1937 MG SA Tickford bodied Drophead Coupe.)

