

The MGB & MGBGT  
by Rick Feibusch



The MGB has become the quintessential British sports car for at least two generations of British sports car fans. I know that there those among us who will try to argue that a particular type of Jag or Healey should have that honor, but the fact is that there are many Britiron aficionados who are young enough to only know those fine examples as old cars - really old cars! On the other hand, the MGB was sold in the States until 1980.

While it was introduced in late 1962 amid the same guarded and skeptical reception from MG enthusiasts that was also afforded to the TD because it lost the "classic" MG look and had been based on a saloon chassis, etc; or the TF because it also lost what was left of the "classic" MG look and had a weird dash board, etc, as well as the MGA, because that lost the "classic" look completely, had become too generic BMC, and wasn't a "real" MG, etc. Besides all of the usual oldtimer grumbling, the MGB was an extremely well balanced and attractive design that would be able to serve as the mainstay of the open sports car market for the next seventeen years.



The "B" was the right car at the right time. It was the perfect "second" sports car to folks who already had owned sports cars but had matured enough to consider roll-up windows, heaters, and all-steel bodywork as a possible advantage. It also appealed to people who would have never even looked at cold, drafty, uncivilized sports car in the past. While there was little visual continuity with the MGA or any of the T types, underneath was all MG. Well yes, the frame was gone, replaced with a new unibody, but all of the components hung on it were MG, some of it going back to the TD series.

The MGBGT was introduced in 1966. As one of the first "hatchback" sportsters in the US, the GT

offered a solid roof, more headroom and usable luggage space in trade for occasional open air motoring. While not big sellers from new and not of high demand as second hand, the GT is now gaining popularity as a "family" sports car and as enthusiasts get older and need more room and cargo space (for transporting the card table, cooler and folding chairs).

The rubber bumpered cars, built from mid-1974 on, were oddly adapted to American government standards yet did not suffer any worse than many other imported marques. They are different than their predecessors in ways that are covered in the "Bad Points" section of this guide.

The MGB is probably the easiest British sports car to restore. There are so many parts and parts suppliers at hand, that I'd bet that there are a number of American cars that would be harder to find parts for. You can buy all of the bits from complete new body shells to hub cap medallions and have them within days. Most parts are interchangeable from year to year, so many of the running upgrades like the five main bearing engines and later model full-synco gearboxes just bolt into place. Once sorted, the running gear is pretty much bulletproof as long as the driver understands that he is driving a "vintage" type of car and hard use, while fun, will increase operating costs considerably.

Most of all, the MGB is fun and comfortable to drive. Once you come to grips with the sitting-on-the-floor-with-legs-outstretched driving position inherent to sports cars of this era, and settle into the roomy cocoon of a cockpit, watch the miles and smiles zip by. The GT liftback is as handy as a late model econobox and so much more fun to drive. They make one feel so casually tweedy.

Rubber bumpered cars are having to go through smog tests that are more rigid and comprehensive than when the cars were new. Broken or missing smog gear and incorrect carburation is seriously frowned upon. Always consider this if you are looking to buy ANY post-1974 car.

Transmissions and rear end gearing is also an area of discussion. Early non-synco boxes are considered weaker than the full-synco later boxes, though it is felt that the earlier full-synco boxes are not as good as the later ones. I'm not sure what to think as I've known people who trashed all of the above in record time as well as other folks who could get 75,000 on a clutch with any of them! All agree that the 3:90 rear end ratio is way too low for today's highway use and suggest fitting an overdrive if one wishes to drive over 65MPH and have a conversation at the same time.

Chrome bumper cars (1963-1974), much like Minis and Bugeye Sprites are all pretty the same and should be valued on condition and the quality of the work that has been done to the car. A pristine original will always bring top dollar, but once a car has been rebuilt and repainted, minor and period modifications become less important to the value.



Rubber bumpered cars (1974 - 1980), since they were redesigned by government regulations, provide some qualities that are a sort of a mixed blessing. While the battering ram bumpers and raised ride height does have an advantage in urban parking situations and off road use, the negative effects it has on handling when combined with the 40% reduction in power from the smogged down engine, produce

a car that is almost the antithesis of an MG. These cars still look good, are fun to drive and can be reasonably dependable. The value will trail a comparable chrome bumpered car by, at least, a couple of thousand dollars until the supply starts to dry up and then the difference will diminish.