

Don Hayter

Designer behind the MGB sports car which became a classic and sold all over the world

Last December a colourful fleet of MGB sports cars drove past a care home in homage to the man inside who had played a key role in designing them.

Don Hayter was a member of the small British team who developed the two-seater that would become a design classic and symbolise the freedom of the roads. With streamlined styling, a powerful 1798cc engine and a top speed of 107mph, the MGB became a popular model here and overseas. By 1963 the British Motor Corporation's Plant at Abingdon, in Oxfordshire, was turning out almost 600 a week.

Hayter helped to conceive, draw, plan and develop the various versions of the MGB, starting with the soft-top (the fixed roof was introduced in 1965). When safety legislation could have killed off the car, he modified its design; and when the US introduced new regulations, he again redesigned the car without losing any of its status. Special models were built, racing cars were developed, and in 1989 Stirling Moss (obituary, April 12, 2020) drove one into third place in the Pirelli Classic Marathon.

The MGB's status was enhanced when it featured in the James Bond film *The Man with the Golden Gun* (1974). The singer Geri Halliwell spent her first pay cheque as a Spice Girl on an orange MGB roadster before eventually giving it away at a charity auction; many years later her husband, Christian Horner, principal of the Red Bull Formula One team, tracked it down and, to her delight, bought it back for her.

Wherever he went in the world, Hayter recalled his pride at seeing MGBs "in such wonderful condition", adding: "They are better than when they left the factory in a lot of cases."

Donald Hayter was born in Maidenhead in 1926, the son of Edgar, a police inspector, and his wife Amy (née Brewer), who worked in a munitions factory.

Young Don was educated at Abingdon Grammar School, Oxfordshire, and was awarded a scholarship to Pembroke College, Oxford. However, with it being wartime he instead went into an apprenticeship in aircraft design at the Pressed Steel Company in Cowley, working on several models including the Avro Lancaster. "The first curvy thing I drew was a 500lb bomb nose," he recalled.

After the war he migrated to cars, creating engineering drawings from a scale model of what would become the Magnette ZA. He drew the doors, tail-lamps and interior panels.

In 1954 Hayter joined Aston Martin in Feltham, west London, as a

draughtsman. "One of my first jobs was to design a new front-end radiator shape for the DB2/4, which was to become the Mk3," he wrote. When Aston Martin moved to Newport Pagnell in 1956, he joined MG's design office at Abingdon. As well as developing the MGB, he was also charged with making the MGA coupé's design production-ready and styling that model's final run at Le Mans. "Syd [Enever, MG's chief engineer] gave me the job to draw up a lower, streamlined roof that used the same windscreen," he said. "That was the last and fastest Le Mans MGA, as driven by Ted Lund."

When Abingdon closed in 1979 Hayter returned to the Pressed Steel Company, transforming the Honda Ballade into the Triumph Acclaim, before taking early retirement in 1982. That year he married Mary (née Haythorhwaite), who survives him with two stepchildren, Simon and Sue. He is also survived by two children from a previous marriage that was dissolved: Alison and Ian, a



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logistics administrator for Miele.

Hayter regularly attended events in his own racing-green MGB GT V8 and served in 2001 as honorary vice-president of the MG Car Club. He also travelled the world giving talks about the MGB and wrote *Those Were the Days* (2012), packed with design sketches, photographs and reminiscences of the MG design office.

In retirement Hayter became involved in manufacturing medical equipment, later learning that the Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre in Oxford needed an engineer to design products for people with disabilities.

"I designed a wheelchair installation with a foot control for a 30-year-old guy who only had motor control of his right foot," he told *Hemmings Motor News*. "He'd never been independent before, but once he got that chair, he wore it out in a fortnight. That was one of the best jobs you can have, helping people like that."



Don Hayter, designer and engineer, was born on

January 24, 1926. He died on October 9, 2020, aged 94.

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