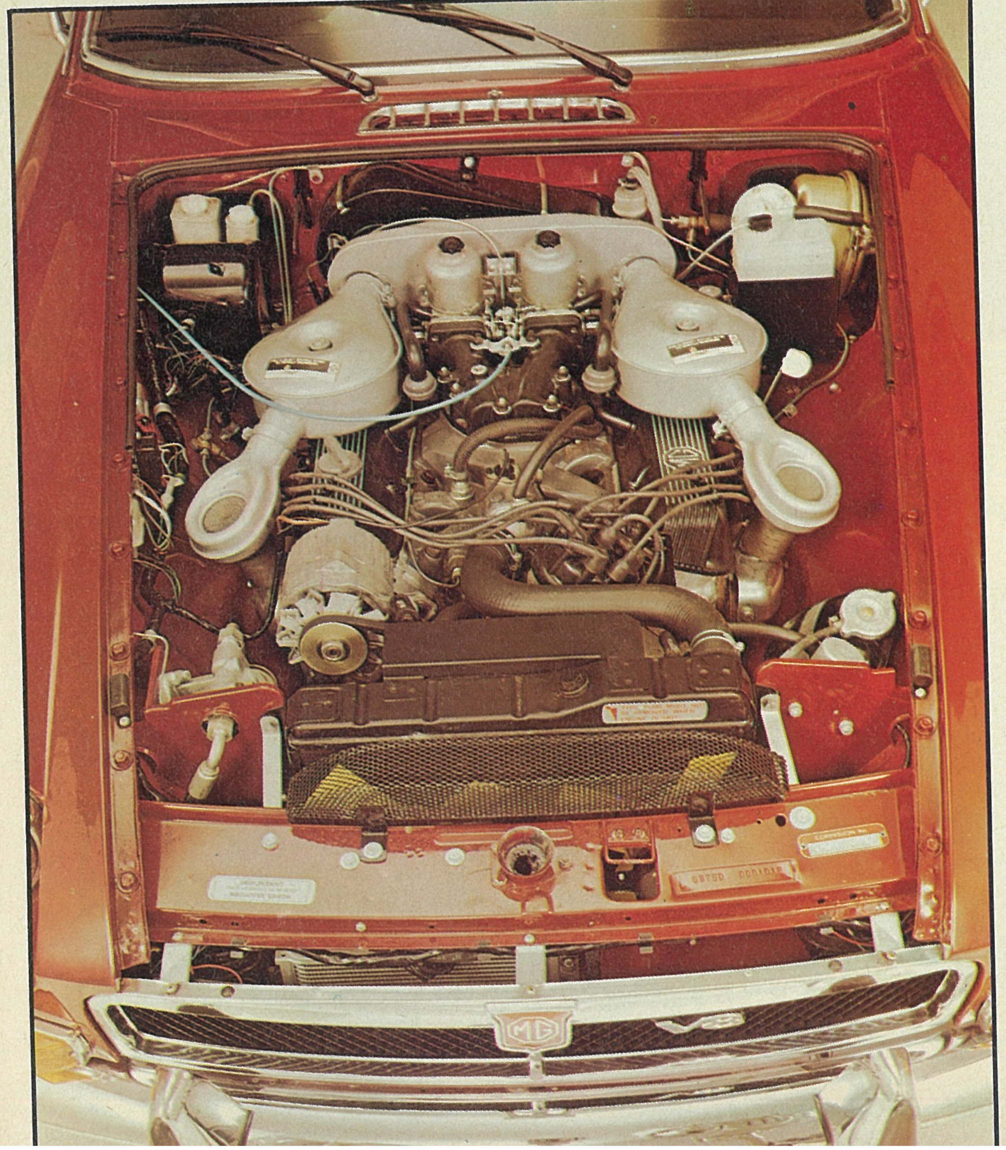
THE SIX-CYLINDER MGC LASTED TWO YEARS, HOW LONG DOES THAT GIVE THE V8?

MG DISCOVERS THE V8



Slotting the Rover 3.5 V8 into the Bee meant slight changes to the bulkhead and inner wheel arches and since Leyland was determined not to make any panel changes new carburetion manifolding was required with the SUs mounted at the rear of the engine.

AFTER 10 YEARS, Leyland has finally dropped a V8 engine into the MGB.

In place of the lethargic 1.8-litre four with its 95 bhp comes the 3.5-litre alloy V8 from the Rover 3500 complete with four-speed gearbox and electric overdrive.

Instead of 18.5-second standing quarter-miles and a 108 mph top speed, you now have 16.4-second standing quarters and a steady 124 mph top speed. At 100 mph you are cruising at a mere 3500 rpm in overdrive and getting an economical 20 mpg.

So at last the MGB has performance comparable with 1973 standards.

But the vital question about the MGB V8 doesn't concern its straight-line performance.

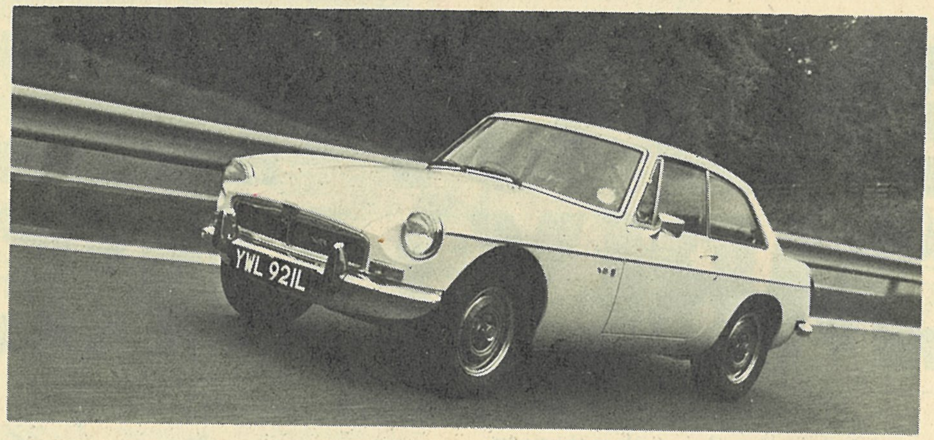
The essential point is this: Does the sudden injection of V8 power *really* save the ailing MGB? Will it enable Leyland to recapture the buyers long ago lured away by the more worthy performance products of GM, Ford, Chrysler, Datsun, Fiat and company?

I think not.

The MGB V8, you see, is a flop.

Well, Leyland may be able to sell all its diminutive Abingdon works can turn out, but as a motor car it IS a flop.

All the V8 power does is to show up only too clearly the car's now very long teeth. If you had been charitable enough the last time you drove a four-cylinder B mentally to grant it a



Stun to the all-new badge work, thrill to the new V8 insignia. It's MG's new MGB V8.

YEARS AFTER IT WAS FIRST SUGGESTED, LEYLAND HAS DROPPED THE ROVER V8 INTO THE MGB. AND LEFT IT AT THAT. NO NEW BODY, NO NEW SUSPENSION, NO NEW BRAKES, NO NEW INTERIOR. JUST THE ENGINE. SOME MIGHT SUPPOSE THAT IS ENOUGH. MEL NICHOLS DISAGREES.

stay of execution, feeling that yes, it was old but maybe still good enough to accept a lot more power, then you get out of this V8 version chastising yourself for being so benevolent. Or is it that by spending a mere $400,000 in development costs on the car, Leyland just hasn't managed to do the transplant properly?

For a start, there will not be a soft-top version of the V8. If you fancy the idea of V8 MG motoring, then you're stuck with the fastback GT. The reason for this, Leyland says, is that the drop-head wasn't rigid enough for the extra power: tests found too much scuttle shake.

Then, almost unbelievably, there is no change to the fastback body. No bonnet hump, no new grille, no flared guards let alone any new panel work or, heaven forbid, a totally new body, nothing to say that it is a V8 save for four chrome badges on the grille flanks and tail and a set of alloy wheels. Even then the badges come from the Rover 3500.

In the status-conscious seventies, how viable is it for a manufacturer to market a car costing $4700 in England with nothing more than a badge and some rather mildly-styled mag wheels to say that it's the big mother of the family?

The car is similarly untouched inside, and the only reaction I could get when I saw it and hopped into it was: Hell, it just looks and feels so old.

Unfortunately — no, more than that: sadly; annoyingly — the car feels similarly antiquated on the road.

The engine, and a very smooth drive-train, gives it silky and quite rapid performance. To the order of those 0-100 mph times of 26 seconds.

However, it doesn't feel as powerful as you expect. Rather gutless, in fact, once you're past 4000 rpm in anything but first or second. In third, top and overdrive, the final 1000 revs are slow to come up, and there is no bite to the effort that comes with them.

Rather than a hard-charging sports car you get one that will get up to a 100 mph cruising speed quite rapidly and that can then hold it mile after mile without effort (effort from the *engine* that is).

The gearbox is a modified C-type unit, with a different casing and ratios tailored to the V8. First is good, running to 39 mph at the 5200 rpm redline. Second is a little too low, giving up at 62 mph. Third goes to a tall 97, fourth to 122 mph at the redline but 124 if you keep your foot flat for a few miles and edge into the red. You can't get maximum speed in overdrive. On the car I drove the tall 0.820 overdrive and 3.07 diff meant that the engine didn't have enough urge to go past 4200 rpm and 120 mph.

But this tall cruising gear gives you the considerable benefit of close to 20 mpg at a steady 100 mph.

In the low gears, the engine sounds fussy once it gets past 4500 rpm, but at its maximum in fourth it is remarkably silent. Excellent.

But this only shows up a major failing of the car. Its old-fashioned pillars, rain channels, big wing mirrors (a compulsory fitting) and poor window sealing create the grand-daddy of all wind noise problems. At 80 mph it is loud, at 100 savage and at 120 you're really shouting to make yourself heard.

That, coupled with an inherent instability above 90 mph, negates the performance and cruising ability offered by the engine.

The ancient MGB suspension, which has been updated only by a stiffening of the rear springs and uprating of the front coils — the lever-arm shockers aren't changed — offers quite a good ride, but no security on the road.

The car never gives you confidence. You're working away at it all the time to keep on a straight path because it feels as if it's being buffeted by wind.

The tail hops about a bit, and at the same time you have a dead, nose-heavy feeling from the other end. It makes the car feel truckish on the one hand, and flighty on the other.

If you care to use that vogue expression "polar moment of inertia", which means, how fast a car reacts to throttle and steering reactions, well, the B rates very badly. With the nose-heaviness it is terribly slow to respond to the throttle back-off or steering even though the rack and pinion operates with a quick 2.9 turns lock to lock. The response is the same whether you're turning the wheel an inch to negotiate a long motorway sweeper at 100, or half a turn to go through a tight back-road corner.

Thus the car is not a pleasant handler at all. It feels heavy and dead in your hands, and acts that way. You react by cursing as you come into a bend and find your nose reluctant to go in tight on the line you want. You grab second and belt on the power to get the tail around in oversteer. Which is crude and rough, and once again not at all what you should be doing in a touring car.

I'm sorry to harp on the point, but really it just feels like a bloody old motor car.

I did not expect this nose-heavy feeling in the MGB V8. The alloy V8 weighs less than the old four-pot. But the pile of ancillary gear and equipment for emissions means that it ends up being slightly heavier than the total four-cylinder package. This changes the weight balance from 47.8/52.2 percent front-to-rear to 49.4/50.6 percent. And that, apparently, is enough to upset the balance of the car well and truly.

The engine itself is almost identical with the way it's used in the Rover. However, for emission reasons the compression ratio has been dropped to 8.25 and the power is now 137 (DIN) bhp at 5000 rpm with 193 lb/ft of torque at 2900 rpm.

Getting the engine in meant changes to the bulkhead and slight mods to the inner wheel arches to give the manifolds clearance.

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