

MG, Dawning of a New Era!



The smart looking MGA Coupe was the first production two-seater MG coupe offering since the Airline Coupe of the mid-1930s. Good friend and former MG Car Club Washington D.C, Centre President Bob Watkin was a lifelong admirer of the coupe design. Mineral blue was a color unique to the 1500 coupe.

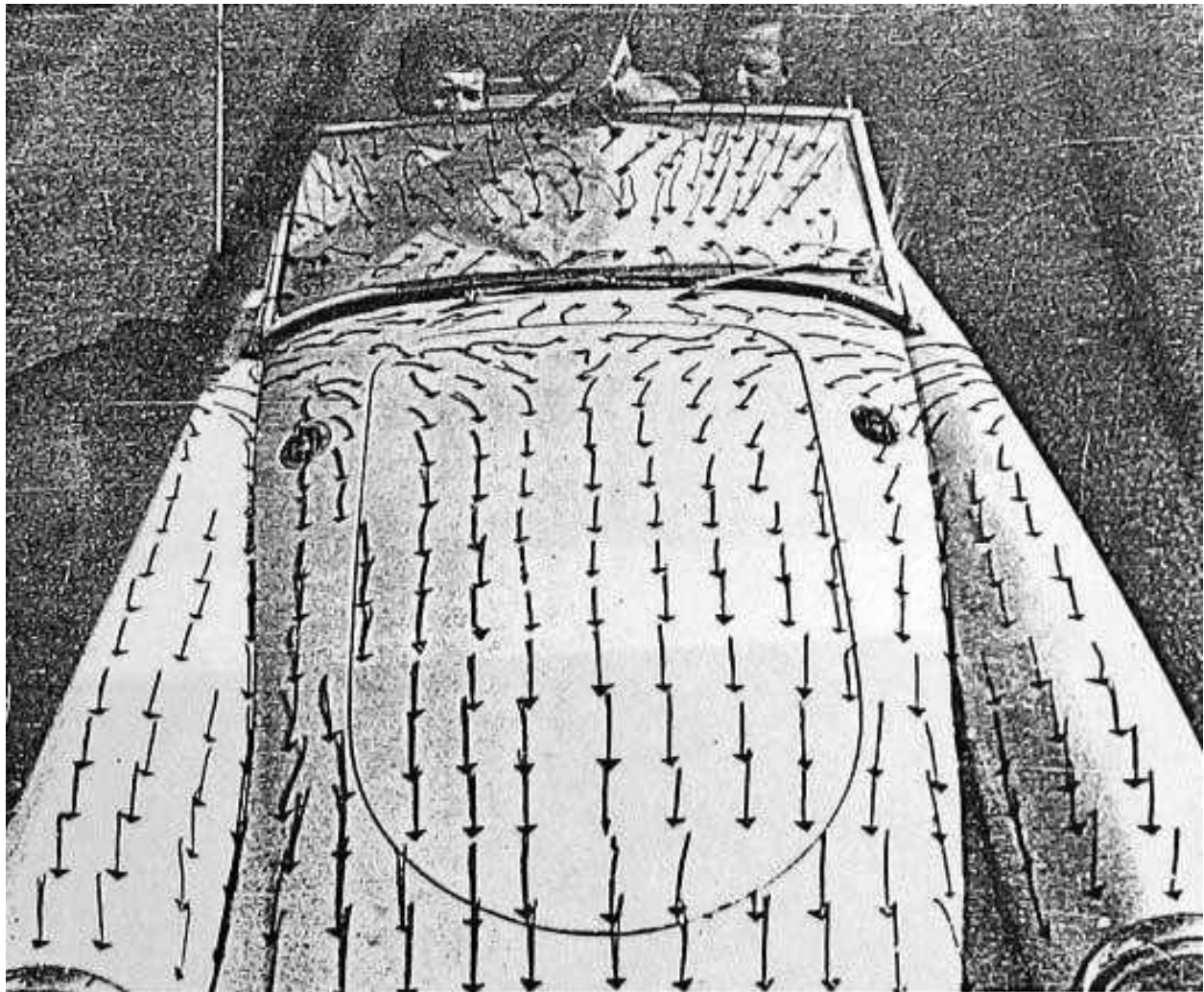
By Bob Vitrikas

When we last corresponded MG was on the ropes, staggering along with an outdated design and compared to its competition, lack luster performance. The solution was in hand, the prototype EX 175, but the timing was bad. Awful in fact. The MG TF Midget was a placeholder, a very lovely design that in time came to be appreciated.

Finally, after three years of patiently waiting, the go ahead was given from BMC headquarters to proceed with the new model called the MGA. An alphabetical fresh start as well as a design and engineering leap ahead, the MGA was indeed the dawning of a new era in the eyes of MG General Manager John Thornley. The MGA marked a number of firsts for MG. It was the first production two seat envelope body MG. Welcome at last to the modern era of car body design! However, the first envelope body MG honors went to the four door, five passenger MG Magnette ZA introduced in 1953, two years before the MGA's debut. The chassis was widened allowing the driver and passengers to sit lower in the car between the chassis rails, lowering the profile 2.5" from the TF, significantly lowering wind resistance and maximizing the push from the 68 hp

engine and increasing the MGA's top speed 10 mph to nearly 100 mph. By comparison that pesky TR3 powered by a tractor engine topped out at 105 mph. Bother!

The following article is reproduced courtesy of MGAGURU.COM which was in turn extracted from the April 1964 issue of Sports Car Graphic. While the effects of streamlining on the MGA's top speed are undeniable, there were secondary effects that were not as beneficial! Please read on...



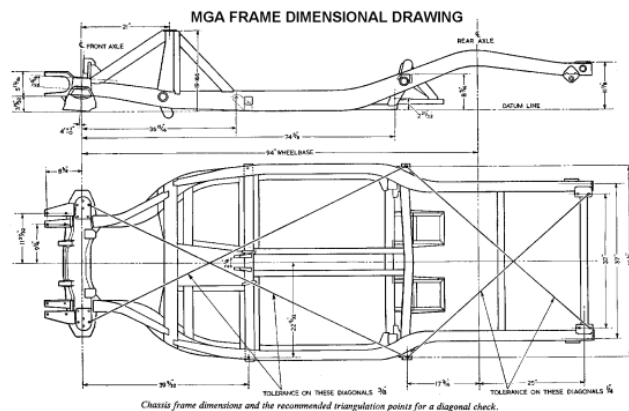
A series of articles on streamlining by Walter Korff appeared in Sports Car Graphic in July, September and November of 1962. As a result Korff was nominated to a Society of Automotive Engineer's Board that presented several papers on streamlining to the Industry. These tests were done at the Aerophysics Lab of Mississippi State University. One of their first automotive projects was to take a standard production sports car (an MGA) and examine it for aerodynamic problems (other than drag reduction). The result was detailed in a paper by J.J. Cornish III, head of the Department, who's conclusions were as follows:

1. The MGA grill alters the course of the air flow entering the front off the car in such a manner as to deflect it away from the entrance to the carburettor air duct and heater duct.
2. The high-velocity air passing beneath the car reduces the pressure within the engine compartment to the extent that it is lower than the pressure on the hood.
3. The air outlets on the hood are located in a position at which air pressure outside the hood is greater than inside and results in air flowing in rather than out.
4. A strong stagnation vortex exists at the base of the windshield, disturbing the flow and giving rise to problems with rain and the operation of the windshield washers.
5. A strong reversed flow of air enters the cockpit from behind (with the topdown) causing severe buffeting in that area.
6. Insufficient ventilation or circulation is provided near the bottom of the cockpit causing high temperatures to develop in that area after protracted driving.
7. The disturbed flow beneath the car, joining with the flow from above, produces a large wake of entrained flow behind.
8. The noise level due to flow separation and other aerodynamic sources is particularly high.

Well never mind those annoying details, the body is undeniably a thing of beauty, eh?

The new chassis was much stiffer than the T Series, providing a solid foundation for attaching the suspension components which in turn improved the handling and ability to enhance the suspension geometry for competition purposes. An interesting “fun fact” about the MGA chassis. MG’s Chief Engineer and designer of the MGA, Sydney Enever, specified a two gauge thicker chassis metal than usual. His reasoning wasn’t stiffening the chassis, though it certainly did that, but rather he said, “You can rust away two gauges of chassis steel and still have a road worthy car.”

Notice the out swept chassis side rails and the “goal post” design bulkhead separating the engine and passenger compartments.



Thousands of MGA owners are thankful for Mr. Enever’s foresight that has in no small measure kept his streamlined beauty on the road to these many years! I’m not sure that Lotus’ designer Colin Chapman, whose design mantra was “Add lightness,” would approve nor would old fashioned Morgan who clung to a chassis that hadn’t been signifi-

cantly updated since 1935 and believed the chassis was a flexible component of the



Polished up and ready to drive from the factory to Le Mans! Number 40 was changed by the Le Mans officials to number 42 and number 64 was on the reserve list. The numberless car was used for practice.

suspension. Ask someone who has driven one!

John Thornley took a massive gamble debuting the new MG design at the 1955 Le Mans 24 hour race. A more public showing could hardly be imagined and the risk of an embarrassing mechanical failure had to be in the back of his mind. His confidence was no doubt buoyed by the long history of MG at Le Mans, stretching back to 1930 when two special works 750 cc MG Midgets competed. Both DNF'd but never mind that. MG's competition department had learned a lot in the intervening 25 years. The team of three MGA prototypes plus a practice car drove from the factory to Le Mans, underscoring their being production cars. Can you imagine doing this today? MG's goal was to finish the race and qualify for the Biennial Cup by attaining a redetermined average speed of 85 mph. The team arrived without incident at the Tuesday scrutineering of cars and crews. The cars, gleaming in their British Racing Green colors and accompanied by their crews in matching green coveralls, drew many favorable comments. Pre-race technical inspection went surprisingly well given the French inspectors penchant for finding any excuse to disqualify cars. The one modification they insisted on was squaring off the tailpipe ends rather than the diagonal cut made at the factory. The reason? To comply with dust-raising restrictions. Really? C'est la vie.

Indeed the MG's acquitted themselves nicely, turning a fastest lap of 93+ mph and touching 117 mph on the Mulsanne straight with "just a whisper of throttle". Wow, that streamlined body really paid off! They needn't have worried themselves about mechanical failure. The team finished the race with just a minor adjustment of the brakes. They didn't even need a tire change! However, it wasn't without drama.

On lap 28, nearly coincidental with the horrible Mercedes crash that killed 80 spectators and nearly ended road racing forever, MG driver Dick Jacobs crashed the number 42 car at White House corner. Ironically, according to John Thornley, the crash was caused by a “slow down” signal given to Jacobs who was driving too fast. Obeying the signal, Jacobs slowed a couple of hundred rpms. The change of pace put him off his cornering routine and he slid off the course, flipping the car and setting it on fire. Jacobs was rushed to the hospital where he survived the accident. But only barely. His



MGA number 42 did not fare as well and was burned to a cinder.

The number 64 and 41 cars continued apace but at 5 AM Ted Lund, driving number 64, crashed trying to pass a TR2, striking a D-Type Jaguar that had done the same thing a few laps earlier. The MG's frame was bent 1-1/4 inches out of track and the left front fender and headlamp were damaged. Lund managed to limp back into the pits where the frame was straightened and the fender and headlamp made roadworthy in an astounding six minutes! The two remaining MGs finished the grueling 24 hours and the



next day they, along with the practice car, drove back to the factory. Following the Le Mans tragedy, racing did continue, as did MGs racing heritage. MGs would race at Le Mans until 1965, returning again in 2001 with the MG-Lola EX257. For the MGA, the Florida based Sebring 12 hour race would be the factory's focus, playing to the U.S. and Canadian markets.

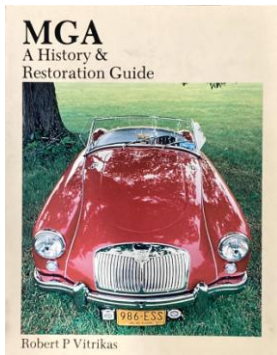
Meanwhile back at the MG factory production was gearing up for the new MG. Production started in September 1955 with the 1956 MGA 1500 model. Price in the U.S. was \$2,195. About a year later the 1500 roadster was followed by a coupe model which was hastily designed in 8-10 weeks. Weight was up just 65 pounds and the price was bumped up \$555 over the roadster. The streamlined top allowed the coupe to top out at the magic 100 mph mark. Yea! On 14 July 1958 the Twin Cam model was introduced. Designed for amateur competition, the Twin Cam featured a double overhead cam engine displacing 1588 cc producing 108 hp at 6,700 rpm. Maximum speed was an impressive 120 mph. Four wheel disc brakes and knock off disc wheels echoed those of the famed D-Type Jaguar. The premium for this competition equipped MG was \$1,150, a hefty 52% increase over the 1500 roadster. Ouch! After a mechanically troubled run, just 2,111 Twin Cams were sold. Left over four wheel disc brakes and wheels were offered as an option on the 1600 and 1600 MkII models. The 1600 model MGA was introduced on 31 July 1959 featuring front disc brakes and an uprated engine of 78 hp. Price in the U.S. for the roadster was \$2,485 and the coupe fetched \$2,706. The end of the MGA line was the 1600 MkII which started sales in April 1961. The MkII had a 1622 cc engine that produced 90 hp. Grille was changed slightly and the taillights were replaced with a cleaner, horizontal design taken from the Mini MkI. MGA production ended in June 1962 with a total of 101,081 leaving the factory making it the most popular two seater sports car ever. Hurrah for the MGA! Long live MG!



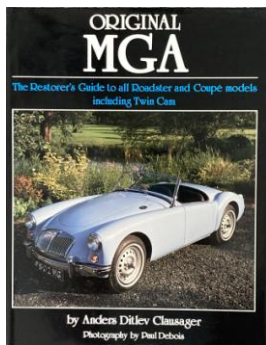
The 100,000th MGA with Syd Enever, its proud designer.

lar two seater sports car ever. Hurrah for the MGA! Long live MG!

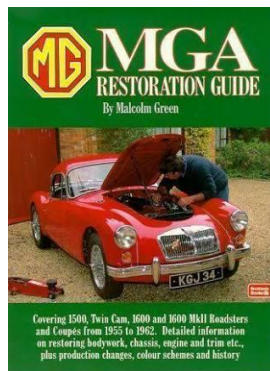
If you would like to learn more about the MGA, here are some books I can recommend.



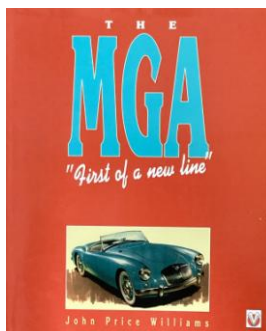
The first book dedicated to the MGA, written by yours truly 45 years ago. A labor of love driven by my desire to spread the word about what a great car the MGA is. The emphasis is on the MGA history which I found fascinating. It is definitely not intended to be a restoration manual, only a guide. At the time this was written the MGA was the 'black sheep' of the MG family. Too new to be collectible and not old enough to be respected. My how times have changed! Printed in black and white with hundreds of photos, it is generally only available in a soft bound edition. As much as I wanted it to be in color and hard bound, I was determined to keep the price below \$20 so the average MGA owner could enjoy it and use it without fear of getting greasy fingerprints all over it. Many have done just that but I'm afraid you'll have to pay a lot more than \$20 for a copy now.



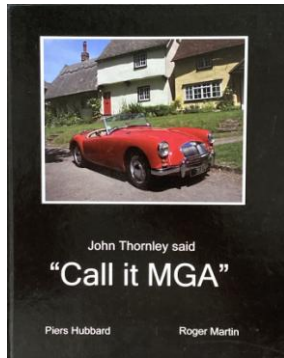
This book, written my friend and retired British Motor Museum Archivist, Anders Clausager, goes into detail on what is and is not original on the various MGA models. Essential for any enthusiast contemplating an MGA restoration project. One of a series of "Original" books.



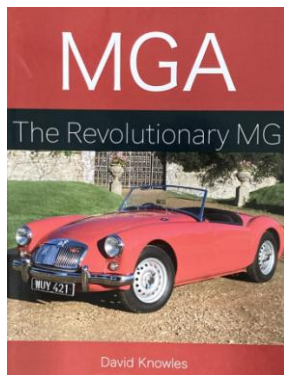
If you are looking for a detailed MGA restoration guide this is it! Written by noted MG author Malcolm Green, this well illustrated paperback will soon become your well-thumbed workshop companion while you labor over your MGA project.



Written by John Price Williams, this book on the MGA is chock full of interesting sidebars and anecdotes. Chapters on making the MGA, overseas sales and production, unusual MGAs and tips on buying, restoring and running are among many interesting and unique insights into the MGA. John's other book, "Making MGs" is also worth a look. Profusely illustrated with lots of period advertisements, it includes 15 pages of beautiful color photos.



Another labor of love written by two life long MG enthusiasts, Piers Hubbard and Roger Martin. Published by the MGA Register in large format hardcover, its 176 pages are richly illustrated with period and modern photographs in color and black and white. Unlike many car books, this one provides hours of entertaining reading about MGA enthusiasts and their driving adventures around the world. Buy your copy from the MG Car Club England gift shop.



The latest in a series of books by MG marque expert and friend, David Knowles. Just when you thought nothing new could possibly be written about the MGA, along comes this well researched and profusely illustrated book. Three-hundred and thirty-six pages filled to the brim with facts, figures, insights anecdotes on the MGA. It is, in my opinion, the most detailed book on the MGA ever. Get your copy now and enjoy it with your favorite adult beverage this winter!