

British Car Sales Over the Years Be Prepared for a Few Surprises!

By Bob Vitrikas

I recently began thinking about the upcoming 101st anniversary of the MG car. You may recall the first MG was registered on 16 August 1923. By happy coincidence or perhaps purposely, the brand new all-electric MG Cyberster will go on sale in the UK in August 2024. And what a car it is! Check out the details on this web site. <https://www.mgcyberster.co.uk/>. And below is a very interesting Top Gear video for your viewing pleasure. Prepare to be surprised!



Here are the vital specs:

310-536 hp

Range 311-360 mi

Weight 4,374 lb

0-62 mph 3.2 sec

Top speed 120 mph

Price 55,000-60,000 pounds

Since 2007, MG has been owned by the Chinese state-owned (read communist) carmaker SAIC Motor. MGs are designed and primarily manufactured in China with other plants churning out MGs in Thailand, India, and Indonesia. MG sales are booming! In fact since 2019 MG is the largest single brand car exported from China. In 2023 MG sold 840,000 cars worldwide and were seen in abundance when Chris and I visited England for the MG Centenary celebration last year.

Surprise #1: In 2023 MG sold nearly 6.5 times as many cars worldwide as all British makes put together sold in the U.S.!

Now for the bad news. MGs won't be for sale in the U.S.. Bummer!

That set me to thinking about the good old days when British cars reigned supreme in the import market in the U.S.. Or did they?

Surprise #2: In 1963, British car imports were only a quarter of German imports!

So I started to dig around for some figures to clear up the fog of ages past. I will say it was more difficult than I imagined. Despite the wonders of the internet, it was a real challenge to find accurate, consistent figures. I've done my best to sort out the inconsistencies and here's what I found.

British car sales in the US (source: Automotive News, April 6, 1964)

MAKE	1963	1962	1961	1960	1959	1946-58	TOTAL
Austin	747	1,624	2,516	4,371	3,709	10,011	22,978
Austin-Healey	7,512	9,614	8,221	14,472	12,948	9,625	62,392
English Ford	3,662	3,901	8,090	21,024	35,284	46,987	118,948
Hillman	2,602	3,268	5,811	10,438	22,941	35,567	80,627
Jaguar	4,653	4,228	3,080	4,971	4,869	17,305	39,106
MG	20,594	8,905	8,235	11,569	14,534	37,198	101,035
Morris	342	892	8,495	9,550	12,547	13,864	45,690
Rolls-Royce	227	179	316	437	351	778	2,288
Rover	342	484	638	544	257	197	2,462
Sunbeam	2,890.	3,187	3,919	4,523	1,614	2,710	18,843
Triumph	20,240	15,338	10,907	15,576	18,804	17,286	98,151
Vauxhall	91	529	2,363.	9,842	18,975	13,752	45,552
Total	63,902	52,149	62,591	107,317	146,833	205,280	

My key takeaways from this chart:

- Of the 12 British makes listed, only two are still being sold in the U.S., Jaguar and Rolls-Royce. However Bentley appears to be MIA. It was most definitely produced in this period but was subsumed under Rolls-Royce so for the sake of argument let's assume the figures for Rolls-Royce include Bentley. Also missing are Aston Martin, Land Rover, and Lotus who may be excused due to tiny sales volume. I believe we can safely assume the Mini sales were included in the Austin and Morris figures. The original Mini came out in 1959 and was sold under both the Austin and Morris brand names.

- There are plenty of other British makes that were sold in the U.S. during this period. Morgan for instance along with a handful of other cottage industry car

manufacturers such as TVR, Ginetta, etc whose total output is minuscule compared to the rest of those in the chart.

- America's appetite for sports cars is evident in the MG, Triumph and Austin-Healey figures added to which are Jaguar and Sunbeam sales.

- Mainstream makes such as Austin, Morris, English Ford, Hillman, and Vauxhall simply couldn't compete with the American home market bread and butter cars from the "Big Three."

Surprise #3 (for me): Triumph handily outsold MG from 1959-1962 with the TR4 nearly doubling MGA sales in 1962. With the introduction of the MGB in 1963, MG started to pull ahead but only slightly.

Now let's fast forward to the present and assess the state of British car sales in the U.S.. We will examine the current makes one by one in alphabetical order. For simplicity sake we will focus on just the major brands.

Surprise #4: Wikipedia lists 192 British car manufacturers still in business! Don't believe me? Check out this link. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_car_manufacturers_of_the_United_Kingdom

Aston Martin: Aston Martin U.S. sales staggered around 500 per year from 2001-2006. In 2007 sales shot up to over 2,000 then dropped steadily down from 2008-2010 before settling around 800 units per year. In 2014 and 2015 (last year for U.S. sales reports) sales were around 1,000 per year. Worldwide Aston Martin sold 6,400 cars in 2022, 30% of them in China, Aston's biggest market. How times have changed 007! Aston Martin U.S. offerings for 2024 are surprising despite a dismal financial state of affairs! Starting with the entry level Vantage coupe and roadster, the DBX SUV (yes really an Aston Martin SUV to compete with the Ferrari, Lamborghini, Maserati, Alfa Romeo, Rolls-Royce, Bentley and ... well you get the idea), the stunning DB12 GT porting 671 hp, 0-60 in 3.5 seconds and a top speed in excess of 200 mph. If that's not sufficient how about a DBS super GT? 760 hp, 211 mph top end but hurry there will only be 499 made. Oops, too late. Even more exclusive, but oddly not faster, is the built to order Valour. Limited to just 110 units it's also sure to sell out fast. Now for something totally different, the Valhalla. Just 999 will be built to a select group of buyers who will cough up a minimum of \$800,000 to join this exclusive club. Competing with the Ferrari SF90, the Valhalla features a 4.0 liter twin turbo V-8 developing 1,012 hp with electric motor assist. An all out race car for the street is rumored but don't hold your breath waiting for a Valkyrie. You might pass out!

Bentley: I'm pleased to say that unlike Aston Martin, Bentley's primary market is the U.S.. We Yanks seem to love them! With addition of the Bentayga SUV in 2016, Bentley's future in the U.S. looks even brighter. In 2023 sales in the Americas totaled 3,848 down from 4,221 in 2022. Bentley offers three basic models, the four door Flying Spur, two door Continental GT (a convertible version is also available), and the Bentayga SUV (a long wheelbase version is available). Electric hybrid versions are

available for all models. If you fancy a bespoke Bentley, Mulliner will custom fit your Bentley to your specifications. The only limit is your checkbook! Speaking of which Bentley pricing starts at a bit over \$200,000 for the Bentayga and climb upward from there. If you have to ask ...

Jaguar: Jaguar sales in the U.S. have had their share of ups and downs lately. In 2016 it was reported to have sold 31,243 cars, more than double the 14,496 sold in 2015! In 2017 Jaguar continued their climb to a total of 39,886 vehicles. Since then things have not been so rosy, plummeting to an abysmal 8,348 vehicles sold in the U.S. in 2023. Ouch! Jaguar's electric models such as the E-Pace, F-Pace and I-Pace SUVs promise an increase in U.S. sales as shoppers turn to embrace electric vehicles. Speaking of which, this is the last year for the combustion engine Jaguar two seat F-Type. Sigh.... In addition to the aforementioned electric SUVs, Jaguar also offers the two seat F-Type and the four door XF.

Land-Rover: Over at Land Rover U.S. sales, fueled by the seemingly insatiable U.S. appetite for SUVs, sales increased from 22,707 in 2008 and climbing to 94,143 in 2019. Not surprising, the pandemic has taken its toll on Land Rover sales but they recovered somewhat to 66,039 in 2023. On 8 April 2024, Jaguar Land Rover announced their year end (April 2023 - March 2024) worldwide sales were up 20%, and encouraging sign that reflects improved production and sustained global demand. Long may it last! If you visit your friendly local Land Rover dealer in Midlothian, you will find they offer a wide range of nine SUVs to suit every taste and budget. In the mid-to-upper range that is.

Lotus: Lotus didn't even make the board from 1948-1963. Their cars were all sold as kits. Recent Lotus U.S. sales topped out around 2,500 cars from 2005-2008. The Aug 11, 2023 edition of Road & Track online references a British Top Gear article stating Lotus sold just 576 cars worldwide in 2022 but as of August 2023 they had taken orders for 17,000 new cars (I'll believe it when I see it!) including the Emira two seat sports coupe and their newly released Eletre electric SUV. Say what? An electric Lotus? Well why not. Lotus has always been known for pushing the technology envelope and the Eletre is a good example. The base Eletre sports a 603 hp motor which launches it from 0-60 mph in just 4.5 sec, a top speed of 160 mph and a range of 304-373 miles. Price is \$107,000. If you want to amp it up (see what I did there?) Opt for the Eletre R starting at \$145,000. For this substantial sum of greenbacks you get a staggering 905 hp, 0-60 in and astounding 2.95 sec! Top speed is 165 mph and range is 254-280 miles. A total of 2,200 Emiras were built in 2023. Lotus says the Emira will be the last Lotus with an internal combustion engine (ICE) so that may have encouraged fans of the ICE to pony up before its too late. The current Lotus line includes the Emeya four door, the aforementioned Eletre SUV, the Emir two door coupe and ultra rare and expensive (\$1M+) Evija electric hypercar. In case you were wondering for this you get 2,039 hp, 0-186 mph in 9.1 seconds and a range of 215 miles. Things are looking up at Lotus these days!

McLaren: McLaren is a newcomer on the U.S. market. Discounting the ultra rare F1, McLarens began arriving on our shores in 2011. Sales climbed to 2,985 in 2019 and then the pandemic hit. Ouch! Sales dropped to 2,122 in 2020 but picked up in 2021 to 2,928 and in 2022 McLaren U.S. sales were estimated at 3,400 so the trend overall is upward.

MINI: The new MINI is doing well in the U.S. and is a popular choice for SVBCC members judging by the number of modern MINIs that show up for our events. The Mini/MINI is the most popular British car of all time with a total sales since 1959 of 5.3 million vehicles. Rule Britannia! The U.S. is it's biggest market, accounting for roughly 25% of worldwide sales. Introduced in 2003, MINI sales in the U.S. have varied from 39,171 in 2006 to a high of 76,354 in 2012, before dropping to a low of 28,047 in 2020 no doubt due in large measure to the pandemic. Not to worry, 2023 sales have increased an impressive 23.8% over 2022 and third quarter 2023 sales are up a staggering 47.8% over 2022! Nothing "mini" about that, eh? The MINI lineup for 2024 includes the traditional two door MINI Cooper (also offered in S trim), the four door Cooper S, the Clubman, the Countryman ALL4 SUVs, a convertible and an Electric Hardtop 2 door. A MINI convertible is also offered. Optional John Cooper Works versions are also offered. Hang onto your seatbelts for 2025, big changes are in store for the MINI brand! The Countryman line will be updated and a MINI Cooper S 4 door model will be added. This fall, electric models will be expanded to include an electric Countryman SE ALL4. Alas the Convertible and Clubman versions will no longer be available. Big changes in the MINI world.

Morgan: This revered marque has been around since 1909 and has had its share of ups and downs with multiple changes of ownership since the 1990s. For many years Morgans weren't sold in the U.S., then an out of the box thinking fellow in San Francisco figured out he would import Morgans from the factory, tear them apart and modify them to meet U.S. safety standards and simply convert the fuel system from gasoline to propane and presto no emissions! Thankfully those days have passed and we can now import new Morgans like the rest of the world. In fact there are five dealers in the U.S.. The closest one is in the D.C. area. Further afield there are Morgan dealers in Bahrain, Dubai, Japan and can you believe it, Vietnam! I won't get into Morgan sales figures for the U.S. but I will say there are four and three wheel Morgans for sale now so get your deposits down before they become unobtainable again!

Rolls-Royce: After a food fight with VW, BMW finally settled down and re-introduced their version of the Rolls-Royce into the U.S. market in 2007. The U.S. is now its largest market. U.S. sales 'exploded' from 149 in 2003 to 1,373 in 2017. Worldwide sales rose from 3,756 in pandemic plagued 2020, to 6,032 in 2023. Models offered in the U.S. include RR's most popular model the Cullinan SUV (gasp!), the budget priced Ghost, the all-electric Spectre and the range topping Phantom. If you have to ask how much they cost ...

So what did I learn from all this?

- There are 9 major British makes currently sold in the U.S., down from the 12+ offered in 1963. Here are my best guesses at some very approximate figures for U.S. sales in 2024 listed in order from largest to smallest.

Land Rover: 75,000

MINI: 35,000

Bentley: 4,000

Jaguar: 10,000

McLaren: 3,400

Rolls-Royce: 1,500

Lotus: 1,000

Aston Martin: 1,000

Morgan: 200

- Estimated total 2024 British car sales in the U.S. will likely reach 130,000. Land Rover and MINI will account for 85% of the total.

Surprise #5: Sales of British cars in the U.S. today are about double the 1963 figures.

- Looking back 61 years to 1963, the swinging '60s and the British sports car and music invasion, MG and Triumph accounted for approximately 64% of British car sales which totaled 63,902.

- Compared to the rest of U.S. import car sales in 1963, the British were a distant second to the Germans who cashed in on sales of 280,227 vehicles largely due to the success of the VW Beetle with sales of 264,184 of the little darlings. VW sales growth since 1963 is a very modest 25%. Next were the French notching 29,157 sales largely on the back of the Renault Dauphine. Today the French are nowhere to be found in the U.S. market. Next came the Swedes at 18,099. In case you are interested, Volvo sales have increased sevenfold since then. Italian car sales stood at 12,609 with the vast majority from Fiat (10,828) and Alfa Romeo (1,651). It is worth noting that FIAT sales in 2023 were just 602 vehicles while Alfa managed to move 10,898 vehicles. Ferrari, Maserati and Lamborghini were so small as to not be counted in 1963 but in 2023 they stood tall with Maserati leading the pack at 8,500 sales, followed by Ferrari at 5,000 and Lamborghini at 3,000. In 1963 the Japanese shipped just 3,002 cars to the U.S. led by Datsun (2,696) and Toyota (306). Honda didn't even appear on these shores until 1969. And the Koreans were not even on the horizon until 1986 when Hyundai sold 168,882 cars in the U.S., a record for first year sales.

Surprise #6: Despite all the ups and downs of the car market since 1963, sales of British cars in the U.S. have increased over 100%. Wow! Could it be that these are the "Good Old Days" for British car fanciers in the U.S.?