

## The Road to Abingdon

One of the reasons for the long post-war success of MG sports cars was due to the clever use of many components from other factories within BMC, BMH or BL Empire, clothed in a unique body. Whilst most of the design and development was carried out in the MG plant at Abingdon, the factory was an assembly plant using mainly brought in components.

The MGB is a fine example of this practice with its bespoke bodyshell fitted with mechanical and electrical parts many common to other vehicles. So much so, that by the time of the MGB introduction in 1962 every part came from outside the plant.

The majority of all MG MGBs were assembled at the factory at Abingdon then despatched for owners across the globe. A number were assembled elsewhere in the world from CKD kits. These kits were brought together at Cowley using parts from the various suppliers – Abingdon's only role being to supply a car number.

Let's look at where some of the major components and parts came from before arriving at Abingdon or elsewhere for the assembly process.

The biggest and most significant component of the MGB is the bodyshell. All the major MGB pressings were made by Pressed Steel at Swindon. A multitude of pressings were brought together at this plant to make up, wings, doors, bonnet, boot and underbody and other body parts.

From 1962 the major body parts and sub assemblies were sent to Morris Bodies in Quinton Road, Coventry. Here the bodies were finally assembled, painted and partly trimmed as had MG bodies of earlier eras. The bodies complete with windscreen and erected hood arrived at Abingdon on transporters. The practice of sending sub assemblies and parts from Swindon to Coventry to build roadster bodies continued until 1969.

The MGB GT was introduced in 1965 and again all the major bodyshell parts were produced by Pressed Steel. However the build process was slightly different. The complete bodyshell was assembled at Swindon and then transferred to Pressed Steel Cowley for painting and trim before moving on to Abingdon for final vehicle assembly. 1969 saw the introduction of roadster body assembly at Swindon too – these also going via Pressed Steel Cowley on their way to Abingdon for similar treatment as the GT shells.

So each UK assembled MGB body was painted, largely trimmed and glazed before entering the gates of the Abingdon assembly plant.

With MG being part of the very large BMC Empire when the MGB was introduced it was logical that parts would be sourced from within it whenever possible. The engines and transmission came from Longbridge – the Austin – to Abingdon, each pre-painted engine already fitted with auxiliaries such as starters, dynamos or alternators. The BMC Empire also made amongst it

products tractors, developed from the Nuffield range. This division, BMC Tractors and Transmissions based in Ward End, Birmingham, supplied Abingdon with the front hubs complete with the Lockheed disc brake and the assembled back axle. Other BMC units involved include SU for the carburettors and fuel pump and Radiators Branch for the grill, the radiator, the oil cooler radiator, the exhaust system and the petrol tank.

Some other sub assembly work was carried out in Abingdon using parts from outside suppliers. This included completing engines and the front suspension assembly. For this, John Thompson supplied the front cross member, Cam Gears the steering rack and Armstrong the shock absorbers.

Other well known names in the industry used in the MGB included Auster for the roadster windscreen assembly, Lucas the wiring and lighting, Smiths Instruments (what ever the logo on the dial) and heaters, Coventry Hood for the hood, Wilmot Breeden for the locks and body fittings. Many of these parts were delivered not to Abingdon but directly to the factories sites where the sub-assembly work took place or to the CKD unit at Cowley. For examples the door locks would go to the body assembly location as would the roadster hoods.

So when one hears stories and myths about MGBs being made at Abingdon take them all with a pinch of realism. In truth the cars were only assembled there using sub assemblies and from parts all made elsewhere.

This assembly practice used by MG 50 years ago is largely the pattern used today by car makers – the only real difference now is that they place the assembly unit alongside the body plant.

The logistics of such an operation in the days before many dual carriageways and most motorways existed must have been extremely difficult. So the road to a completed MGB from Abingdon or elsewhere was a long and often a long complicated one.

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#### References

Visitors Guide to Abingdon	MG Car Company 1964
Aspects of Abingdon	Rhoades MG World (USA) 1996
MGB, MGC and MGB V8	Knowles Haynes 2004
MGB including MGC and MGBV8	Knowles MBI 2000
MGB Illustrated History	Wood and Burrell Haynes 1988
The Original MGB, MGC and MGBV8	Clausager Bay View Books 1994
The MGA, MGB, MGC Collectors Guide	Robson MRP 1977
Peter Neal	MGCC Archivist 2012

#### Suggested pictures

Early MGB production Line Peter Neal MGCC Archive  
Assembly of roadster bodies Coventry BMIHT  
Assembly of GT bodies in Cowley BMIHT  
Abingdon Assembly lines MGCC Archive