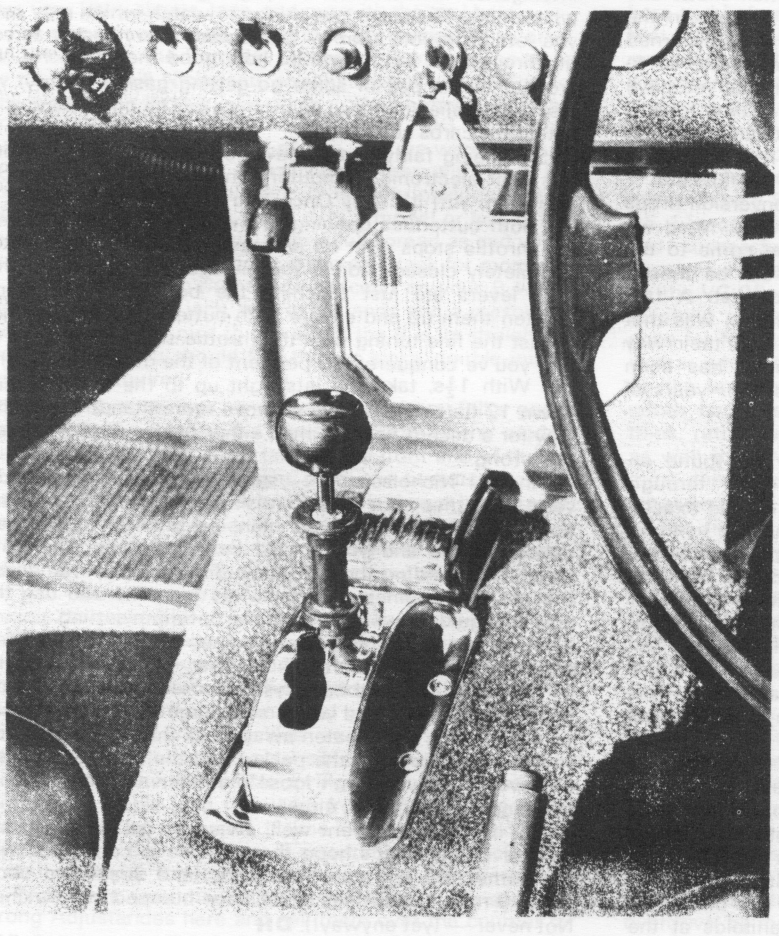
Die-hard enthusiasts would never approve, but BMC plug yet another hole with, of all things, an automatic MGB

MODERN MOTOR road TEST

AUTOMATIC MGB



A FEW years ago a sports car with automatic transmission would have been an absolutely unsaleable item.

Sports car buyers used to be die-hard enthusiasts who revelled in the discomforts of a harsh, windblown ride so that they might have good handling, quick steering, lively performance and those other qualities for which sports cars were renowned.

Depriving them of the privilege of changing their own gears would have been unthinkable.

But times have changed, fortunately.

Harsh, windblown riding qualities aren't a necessary addition to every sports car these days.

The MGB Mark 2 clings pretty tenaciously to some of its old characteristics, particularly in the ride department, but it proves it is prepared to move along with the times by offering of late, automatic transmission.

It happens to be the ubiquitous Borg-Warner 35 unit, and in this particular application it works as well as any Borg-Warner we've experienced.

Ratio selection is effected by a centrally located floor quadrant, which has the distinct disadvantage of being unlit, except for a map-reading light which looks to have been tacked on as an afterthought.

Once the car is in motion, ratio swapping is a straightforward business, and the distinct calibrations, together with the transmission's normal overriding safeguards, make its manipulation a relatively easy job.

Reverse lockout is effected by a nylon sleeve on the shift lever. This has to be lifted so that reverse position can be selected.

The transmission is a smooth operator in most circumstances, but consistently gave out with a very loud "clunk" as it changed from intermediate to low at trickling speeds.

Under full throttle, it changes smoothly, quickly and without hesitation, the upshifts coming at about 35 and 65 mph.

Holding the respective ratio allows a slightly higher maximum in both low and intermediate, but acceleration is not improved significantly by this.

The test car gave the impression of accelerating very hard, but this was largely due to an indecently inaccurate speedo.

The final drive ratio of the automatic is 3.70 to 1 compared to the manual car's 3.909. When we taxed BMC about the car's inaccurate speedo they deduced from our figures that the wrong speedo had been fitted!

During top speed runs the car zipped up to an indicated 100 in what seemed just a few seconds, then continued to climb until, as it passed through the traps, it was indicating 120 mph! In actual fact, the best top speed we recorded was 101, which makes the speedo 20 percent fast.

With the speedo calibrated correctly, performance isn't so brisk, although the automatic still gets about its business willingly enough.

The standing quarter-mile was run in 18.55 sec. average, whereas the manual we tested a few months ago clocked 18 sec. average.

Zero to 60 takes 11.7 sec. and 80 mph is reached in 21.8 sec. The

manual car ran these speeds in 11.1 sec. and 20.9 sec. respectively.

Because of the slightly taller final drive, the automatic doesn't work quite as hard as the manual B. For this reason it is a slightly more restful touring car, fractionally less noisy, and possibly — because automatic transmission inhibits cog swapping — more economical than might be expected.

For some reason which isn't clear to us the automatic B handled somewhat differently from the manual car. The most obvious explanation is tyre pressures, but whatever the cause, the automatic didn't understeer as strongly, and in fact slid through many corners with the tail well and truly in the classical oversteer position. It was good fun and, being traditionalists, we enjoyed the sensation.

The tyres fitted as standard equipment are Olympic GT radials, and they perform well, although inclined to squeal in really hard cornering.

Mechanicals

There's nothing unconventional about the MG's specifications. The motor has been around for years, is the BMC B series block of 1798 cc., and with twin SU carburettors.

The brakes are front disc and rear drum, and they perform well, giving the car stopping power comfortably equal to its performance.

Steering is rack and pinion, and pretty dead feeling, with 2.9 turns of lock and not much self-centring action.

One of the features of the MGB we like least is the tremendously awkward top. We found it easy enough to collapse and stow, although even these arrangements are clumsy. But erecting it was another matter. We fumed and struggled for 30 minutes the first time we tried it.

No woman owner could hope to erect the top alone. They just don't come that strong.

Women drivers will, however, find the car an attractive proposition, because of its automatic transmission. •

Manufacturer: BMC Australia.
Test car supplied by them.
Price as tested: $3445.

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE

Water cooled, four cylinders in line; cast iron block, five main bearings.

Bore x stroke	80.26 x 88.9 mm.
Capacity	1798 cc.
Compression	8.8 to 1
Carburettors	twin SU HS4
Fuel pump	electrical
Fuel tank	12 gallons
Fuel recommended	super
Valve gear	pushrod ohv
Max. power (gross)	95 bhp at 5400 rpm
Max. torque	110 lb. ft. at 3000 rpm
Specific power output	54.5 bhp/litre
Electrical system	12v, 58 amp hr. battery, 11 AC alternator.

TRANSMISSION

Three-speed torque converter automatic.

Gear	Ratio	Max. mph
Low	2.38	35
Intermediate	1.43	65
Drive	1.00	101
Final drive ratio	3.70 to 1	

CHASSIS

Wheelbase	8ft. 7in.
Track front	4ft. 1in.
Track rear	4ft. 1¼in.
Length	12ft. 9in.
Width	5ft.
Height	4ft. 1¼in.
Clearance	5in.
Kerb weight	17 cwt. 90 lb.
Weight distribution front/rear	54/46%
lb./bhp	20.4 lb.

SUSPENSION

Front: Independent by coils, wishbones, and telescopic hydraulic shock absorbers.

Rear: Live axle by semi-elliptic leaf springs and hydraulic lever-type shock absorbers.

Brakes: Disc/drum, 310 sq. in. of swept area.

Steering	rack and pinion
Turns lock to lock	2.9
Turning circle	32ft.

Wheels: Knock-off wire with 165 by 14 tubed radial-ply tyres.

PERFORMANCE

Top speed	101.4 mph
Average (both ways)	100.2 mph
Standing quarter-mile	18.5 sec.

Acceleration:

Zero to	sec.
30 mph	4.3
40 mph	6.2
50 mph	8.7
60 mph	11.7
70 mph	16.5
80 mph	21.8
90 mph	29.6

	kickdown
20-40 mph	3.7
30-50 mph	4.6
40-60 mph	4.3
50-70 mph	5.4
60-80 mph	9.8

BRAKING: Five crash stops from 60 mph.

Stop	percent G	pedal pressure
1	.86	58 lb.
2	.84	60 lb.
3	.84	62 lb.
4	.80	64 lb.
5	.80	65 lb.

Consumption: 23.2 mpg over 318 miles in normal country and suburban use.

Speedo error:

Indicated mph	30	40	50	60	70	80
Actual mph	26	35	43	54	60	70