



First cars off the line at Zetland in 1968, just prior to commencing full production . Note the reversed front indicator/side lights. (See footnote 2).



Aerial view of the Zetland site. The CAB 3 building is at the top right of the photo, with the MGB assembly line beneath the darker roof.



MGB funeral on the day marking the end of production. Note the hexagon surrounding "MG" on the headstone.



Print and TV media attending the event of the final MGB coming off the line.

History of the Australian-assembled MGB

By Tom Aczel

Successive Australian Federal Governments from the early 1900s pursued protectionist tariff policies to encourage the development of local industries and infrastructure. (Lower rates applied for British Commonwealth countries, especially the UK, till Britain 'turned its back' on Commonwealth member nations and joined the EEC in 1973.) Following the Second World War, the then Labour Federal Government's advice was that another world war within 20 years was probable, and that, without a substantial increase in the country's population and industrial base ('Populate or Perish'), Australia was likely to face an Asian invasion from the north (referred to at the time as 'the Yellow peril'). Consequently a massive immigration policy was instituted. Simultaneously, major encouragement was given to established overseas motor vehicle manufacturers to establish production facilities in Australia. General Motors and BMC were the earliest to proceed. General Motors – Holden released their first Holden in 1948. BMC's first Australian factory was completed at Zetland, Sydney in 1952. (William Morris had come across the

Zetland site on one of his visits to Australia. He recommended to the BMC board that BMC purchase the site for an Australian factory. The board considered and rejected this proposal, whereupon Morris purchased the site himself. He subsequently sold the property to BMC a matter of months later, at a considerable profit; Morris was ever the successful businessman!)

BMC (Australia)

Most people overseas were and remain quite unaware of just how large a venture BMC (Australia) was. The factory, on a 57 acre site, was equipped with its own foundry facilities, panel pressing facilities, trim and paint shops and research laboratories. It possessed the largest press at the time in the Southern Hemisphere. Engines, transmissions, axles and vehicle body panels were all cast, pressed and assembled locally. (Lucas and Smiths established local factories to support BMC as well as other producers in Australia.) As a result, a number of unique vehicles for the Australian market were constructed here. (The original prototype MGC, incidentally, used an Australian 2.4 litre 6-cylinder

engine based on 'one and a half' 1622cc 'B' series engines.)

Despite BMC (Australia)'s significant local facilities, in the case of Australian assembled MG cars, mechanical components and body panels were imported from the UK.

The MGB in Australia

The MGB was assembled in Australia from 1963 to 1972. In total, approximately 9,000 examples were built over this period. All locally assembled MGB models, as with the preceding MGA, were roadsters. (The Austin Healey Sprite and later the MG Midget were also assembled locally alongside first the MGA and then later the MGB.) The Australian content was ultimately 45% of the car's value.

Pressed Metal Corporation

The Mk I MGB was assembled by 'Pressed Metal Corporation' at their factory in Enfield, Sydney. Pressed Metal Corporation was a sizeable venture, partly owned by Larke Hoskins (a large local BMC distributor). The production of the MGB followed on naturally from the MGA, about 2,500 of

which had been built at Pressed Metal from 1957 to 1962.

Engines were hot-run tested at the BMC Zetland works, and then crated up for transport to Pressed Metal. Suspensions were assembled and painted at Zetland, and similarly transported to Pressed Metal factory. Springs, electrics, paint and an ever progressively larger proportion of the trim were locally sourced. As a result, local body colours, though similar to their UK counterparts, were unique to Australia. Early colours included colours such as 'Sky Blue' (similar to but lighter than Iris Blue), 'Monza Red', 'Nurburg White' (similar to Old English White, but less creamy, with an undetectable green tint), Katoomba Grey (a little darker than Grampian Grey), and of course, British Racing Green. (The last had been also available on locally assembled MGAs, unlike their UK counterparts.)

Because of the relatively small numbers involved, all Australian MGBs were similarly specified. Only roadsters were

ever built locally. All cars had wire wheels, the oil cooler and a front anti-roll bar fitted as standard. Only the pack-away style soft top was offered. Interior trim was, for both cost reasons and because of the harsh local climate, always in vinyl. Contrasting piping disappeared after 1964, and by 1966 'black' was the only available trim colour. The only options apart from the colour were the (initially rarely fitted) heater, and a dealer fitted radio. Overdrive was not available, even as an option, until the last 200 or so Mk I vehicles assembled in late 1967 and early 1968.

While ultimately the Australian built MGB was built up locally from the most basic panels, the early cars were just 'skinned' in Australia, with the guards, doors, bonnet and boot lid being welded on or fitted here. Rust proofing on these early cars was rudimentary at best, with the bodies just 'slipper dipped' in primer. (The author's own Mk I MGB was already visibly rusting by the time it was four years old!)



The first two cars off the Zetland line had to go through again. In the effort to outdo Abingdon production tolerances, the doors of these two cars were found to be jammed tight once the cars were lowered onto the ground!

MGB assembly at the BMC Zetland site.

BMC ultimately purchased the Enfield Pressed Metal factory outright. Production of the MGB was transferred to a dedicated facility in their CAB 3 building at the main BMC plant in Zetland, Sydney. Jigs were commissioned from Dorman's in Victoria, so that even the 'floorpans-tunnel-sills-bulkheads' under-structure could be built up on-site in Sydney. Bodies were here far more elaborately rust proofed, going through a 'Rotodip' process, whereby the entire body-shell was immersed and rotated on a skewer in primer.

Again, options were limited to simplify production. Overdrive became a standard fitting. (The pack-away style hood survived till the advent of the revised Michelotti top in 1970, at the time of the introduction of the recessed black grille 'fish mouth' model. See also (1) below. Interior trim design, particularly the door trim styling, was now unique to Australian cars. The short-lived 'automatic' option was also offered in Australia from 1969, and though well received by the press, was, as in other countries, not especially popular, and was discontinued within 18 months.

Uniquely Australian MGB features MGB Mk 'one and a half'.

The changeover of production from Enfield to Zetland occurred just before the introduction in Australia of the Mk II model. Some partly completed Mk I cars and some Mk I body shells were transported



The "last" MGB. (Actually it wasn't quite the last; just almost!).

from the old site to the new. These cars were finished off for selling to the dealers. A few cars though had yet to be fitted with their engines and transmissions. By this time, however, the imported transmissions available were the later full synchromesh gearbox/overdrive units. Never a company to waste money, BMC set about modifying the off-side foot well and transmission tunnels to accommodate the later transmission and starter motor. An unknown number of cars were even sold with the now redundant vacuum inhibitor switch, relay and harness of the earlier D-Type overdrive still fitted to the firewall and heater shelf. The manifold vacuum port was simply blanked off.

Mk II Reversed Indicator/Side (parking) Lights

As reference to the Mk II production line photos will confirm, the Australian MGB Mk II had the indicator/side (parking) light units reversed compared to the Mk I (and to all the Abingdon built MGB models), with the amber indicator segment outboard of the clear lens. This practice reverted to the original orientation with the introduction in 1969 of the revised front mudguard where this light unit was moved in closer to the grille. See also (2) below.

'Overdrive', 'Automatic' and 'Mk II' badges

BMC (Australia) always felt these features were worth advertising, and appropriate badges denoting these enhancements were fitted to the Australian cars.

The 'Automatic' and 'Mk II' badges were shared with other local BMC vehicles, such as the Austin 1800. The 'Overdrive' badge however was unique to the MGB.

It remains uncertain whether some Mk I overdrive cars were fitted with the 'Overdrive' badge at the factory. (More likely is that they were fitted subsequently by dealers caught with old stock, and by owners wanting to appear to drive the latest model.)



"Funeral Procession" on the day marking the end of Australian MGB production.

The end of Australian MG production.

Australian assembly of the MGB (and the MG Midget) was discontinued late in 1972. The Federal Government had announced a restructuring of the tariff arrangements, whereby an 85% local content was to be required for a favourable import duty. The buying public's interest in small, responsive but relatively low-powered sports cars was waning in any case with the growing interest in high powered sedan derivatives (the local equivalent of the American 'muscle cars'). Cars such as the Holden Monaro and Torana XU1, the Ford Falcon GT/HO and Chrysler Valiant Charger were extremely fast cars. (The Ford Falcon GT/HO was in its time the fastest four door sedan produced anywhere in the world.) These locally built powerhouses could be seen competing most weekends on the various racing circuits around the country (most famously at Bathurst), and it was these cars that now fired the imagination of the young (and young at heart). These two factors, along with the impending introduction of the P76 large sedan requiring freeing up of production space, led BLMC to take the decision to wind up local assembly of the MGB.

The news of the end of local MG production was announced to the motoring press and media. The factory staged a funeral and wake marking the end of local MG assembly. The event received extensive media coverage. Perhaps symbolic of the lack of interest in the MG

brand's tradition and history held by its new owners (British Leyland), the letters 'MG' in the headstone at the 'funeral' were surrounded by a hexagon rather than the traditional octagon.

Australian MGB Production Numbers

(Calculated by Ron Switzer from the original service records)

Year	Number	Year	Number
1963	444	1968	1026
1964	802	1969	1089
1965	915	1970	1053
1966	1084	1971	883
1967	1228	1972	800 (app)

Total: (approximately) 9324

1) The revised Mk II model, which featured the recessed black grille, squared off rear lights and other changes, was referred to in Australia as the **MG BL** (for British Leyland').

2) Reference to the front indicator/side light units' revised position, where they were brought in closer to the grille from 1969 in all MGB cars, rarely if ever appears in the contemporary literature. While many subsequent books about the MGB do point out this modification, the **reason** for this alteration, to the writer's knowledge, is never given. Some incorrect conjecture has been written, including that the wearing out of the dies for the front mudguards had allowed the position of the light units to 'creep' out laterally. However, according to John Lindsay (former BMC (Australia) production engineer), the true reason for the alteration was the introduction of European lighting regulations at the time, mandating that the side light and headlight centre points should be vertically in line.

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The three badges unique to the Australian assembled MGB.