

Mike McCarthy
witnesses the . . .

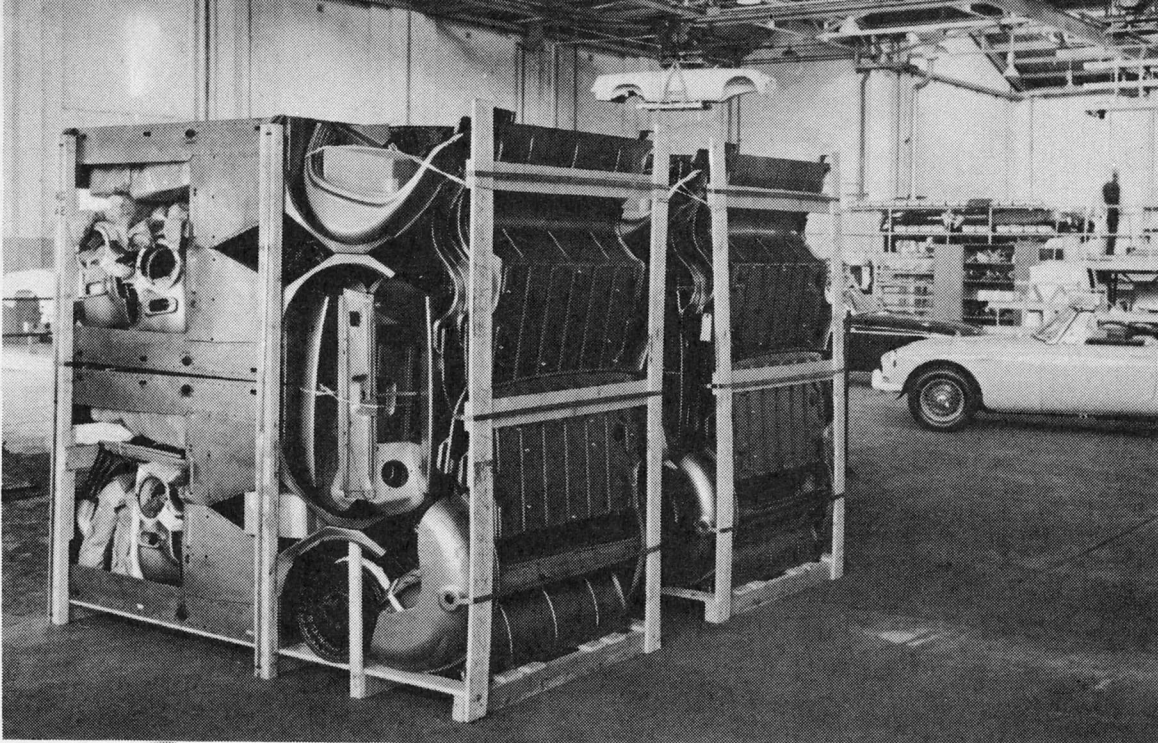
BIRTH OF A B

It doesn't really matter if you're talking of cars or whatever — the birds and the Bs are quite similar. They come first in small packages and soon blossom into full-scale working models, ready for a sporty future!

MG has long been Australia's most popular sporting marque and never more so than today. Last year, for example, well over 1200 Bs were sold here. The next best total was 290-odd for the Honda 600 and 800 roadsters and coupes combined.

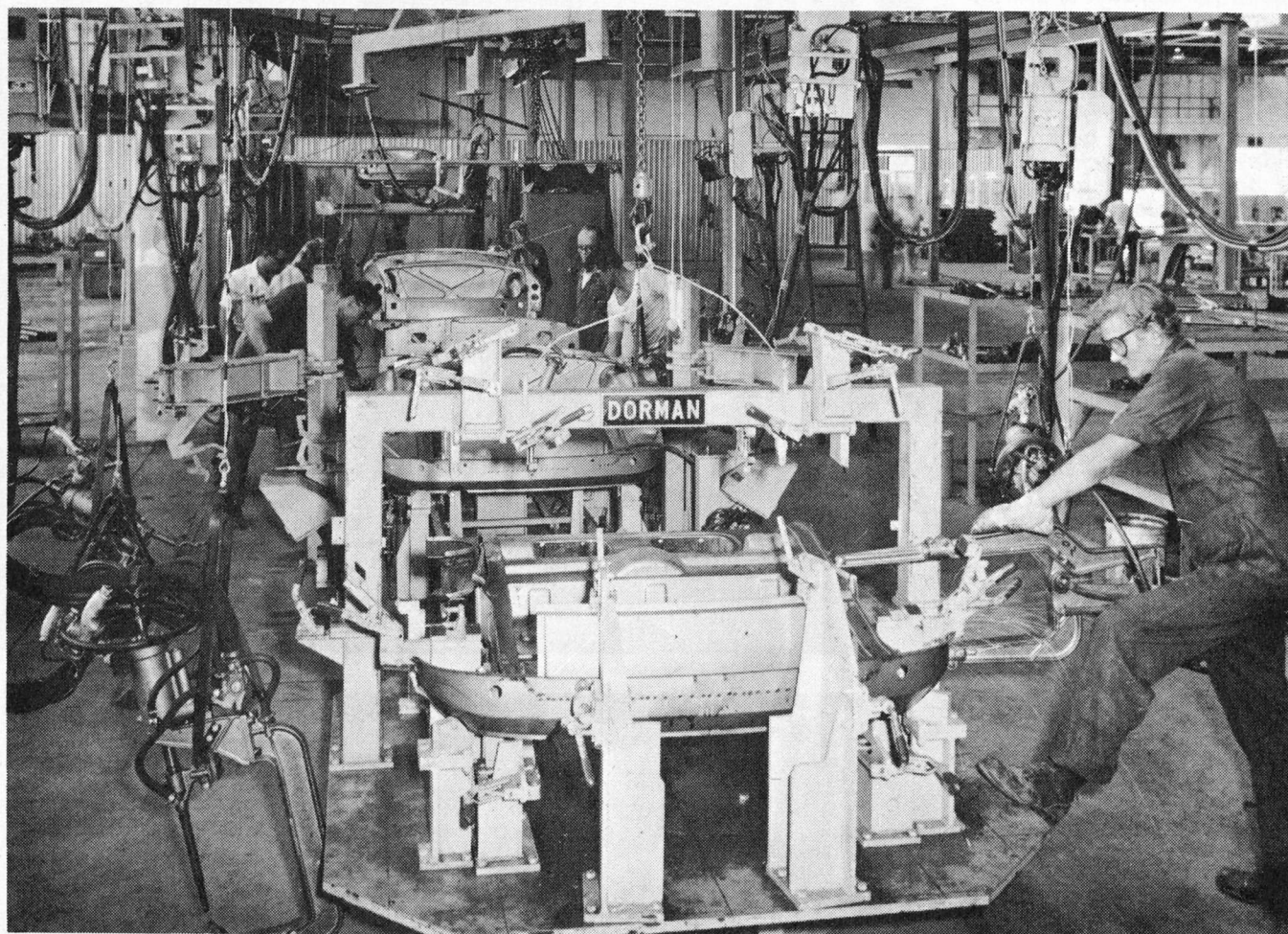
So successful is the MGB that it recently wrote a new chapter on the sportster scene by becoming the first such car ever to achieve sufficient volume to warrant local production by its parent manufacturer. Pressed Metal Corporation was formerly responsible for assembling MGs (the B, and the A before it, not to forget the Sprite since 1960). At Pressed Metal, as with the Triumphs assembled by AMI in Melbourne, the sportsters were mixed in with a variety of other vehicles, sedans and commercials. During the past few years, however, the demand for the MGB has grown to such an extent that it eventually became feasible for BMC to handle its assembly. To minimise the mixing of sportsters and other vehicles, BMC built a new plant especially for the Gs and Midgets. They are not, of course, manufactured here. Sales running to tens of thousands annually are necessary before that becomes practical for any vehicle. Instead, they are imported in CKD form — Completely Knocked Down. Apart from the CKD Triumph models, and the Lotus which comes in kit form to be put together by the distributor,





Two crates of (Mid-get) parts awaiting unpacking. Maximum use is made of the available space. Each crate is sufficiently large to contain almost all the parts for one car. The elevated B shell in background has just returned from paint shop, is about to be lowered on to final assembly line.

The embryo of an MGB. This is where the body-chassis unit is born. Dozens of pressings are clamped in massive jigs to form a single structure which is mainly spot-welded together.



all other production sportsters that come to this country are fully imported.

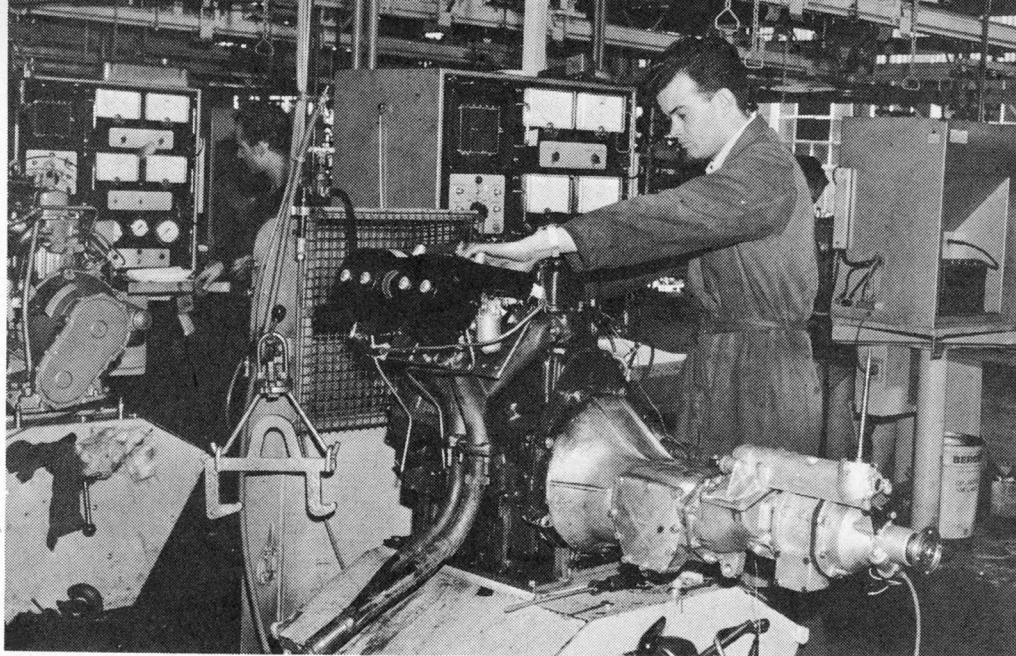
The CKD method saves the buyer many hundreds of dollars because it means the car has some *local content* which entitles it to lower duty rates than apply to fully imported examples. In the case of the B, local content amounts to over 50 percent; that's to say the value of local labor and materials that go into it account for over 50 percent of its ex-factory cost. Included in the local materials are tyres, battery, paint and trim.

The local B does not differ significantly from the English-built model, except that ours has wire wheels and overdrive as standard whereas these are optional extras in England. On the other

hand, various trim colors are available in the home country, but it's black-only in Australia.

The imported parts arrive in large crates, the packing of which must in itself be something of an art since nary an inch of space is wasted. Some mechanical elements (such as the complete engine/gearbox/overdrive unit) arrive in a fully-assembled condition, and a few panels are already welded together (the outer skin to the door frame, for instance), but in the main the components are knocked down into as small pieces as practicable.

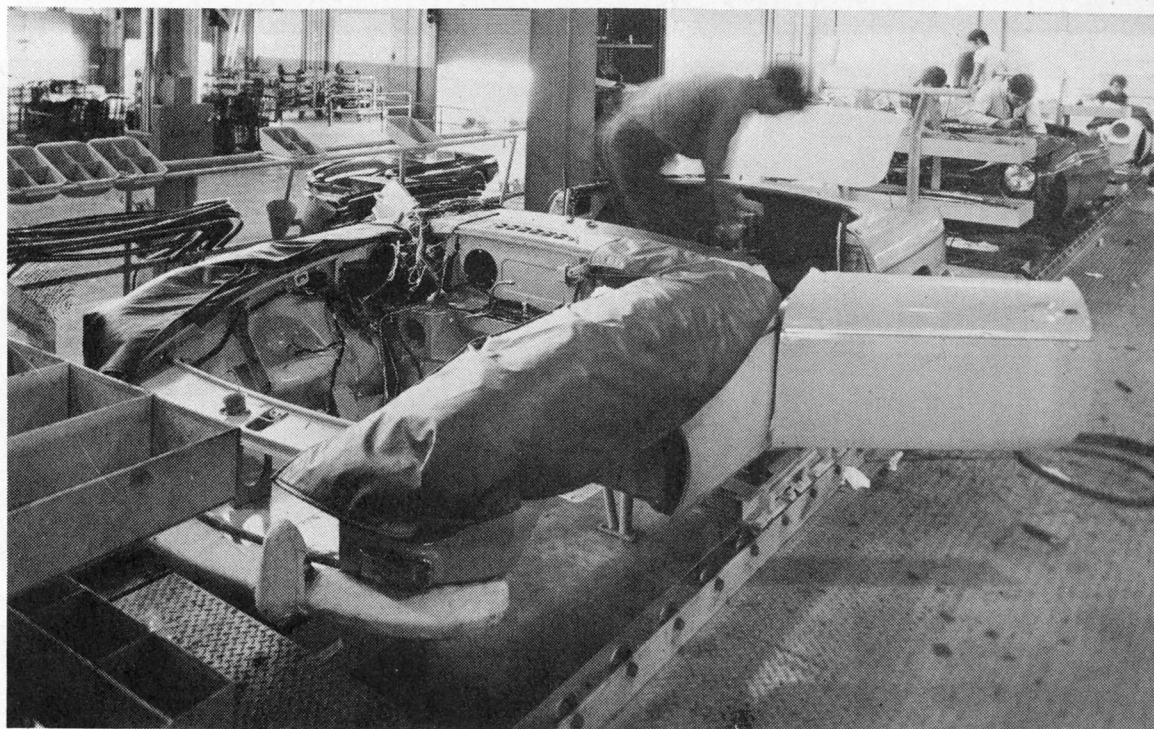
When unpacked, the various parts are taken to different sections of the factory. The engines, for example, head to the Hot-Run department where — in company with 1800, 1100, Deluxe, Cooper and



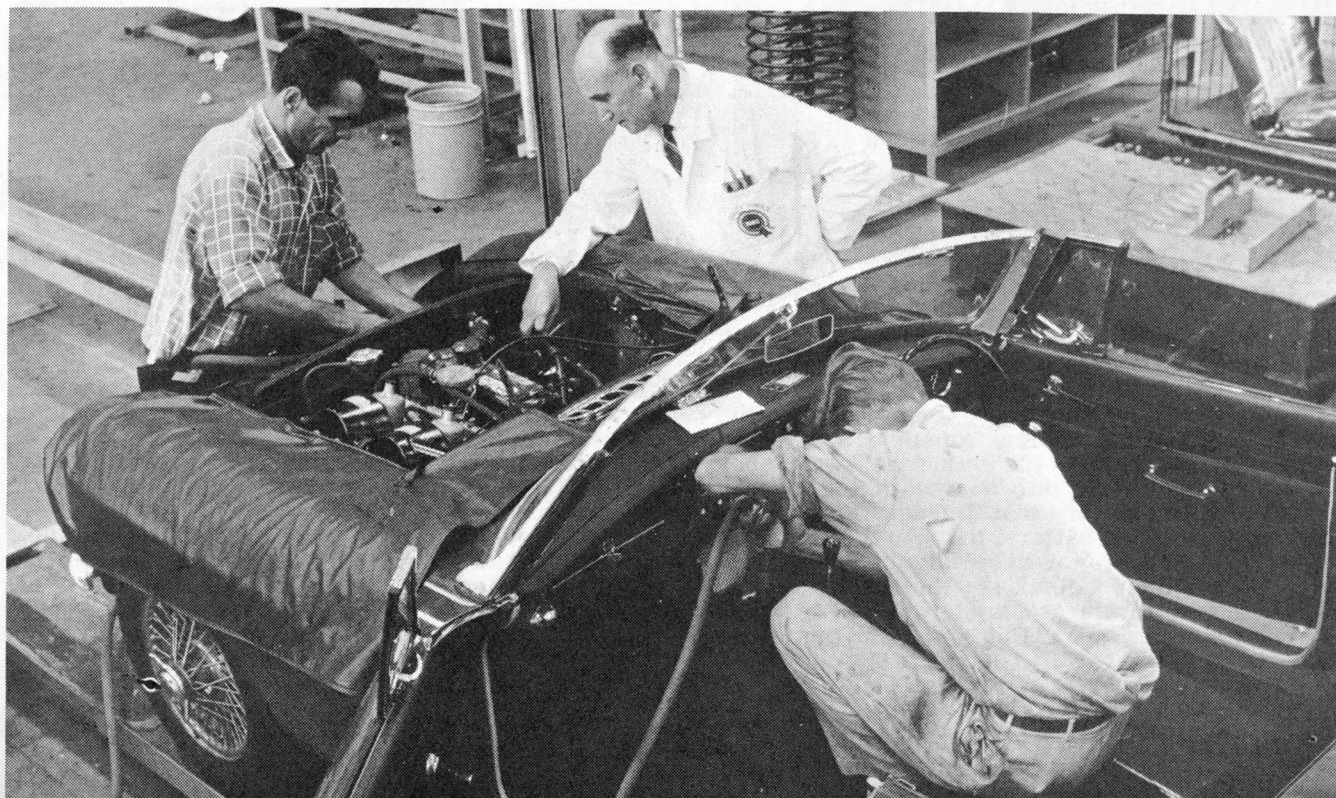
Left: In the Hot Run department, the MG engine is operated for a half-hour, during which time some 29 different checks are made to ensure everything is up to standard. Unlike most parts that go into the B, the engine/gearbox/overdrive unit is imported in fully assembled condition.

Right: Sportster on a spit. As chocolate-brown B shell emerges from RotoDip rust-proofing process, operator (on left) applies a further protective coating to undersides.

Right: When shell returns from paint shop it goes to the final assembly line where it passes through 14 assembly stations. In addition to the many bins of parts alongside the line, each car is accompanied along the first leg by a triple-shelved, multi-trayed arrangement that also contains many of the required components.



Below: Nearing completion, the B at this stage is virtually a going concern apart from seats and bonnet. With those parts fitted, the headlights adjusted and front suspension / steering aligned the B is ready to roll from the assembly line for testing.





other engines — they are installed on test beds. Water, fuel and exhaust systems are connected, together with an array of instruments, and the engine is then run for about a half hour while some 29 separate checks are performed.

Meanwhile the panels have gone to the body shop and other parts (steering, suspension, etc) are being assembled, if necessary, before being placed at strategic positions along the assembly line. In the metal-finishing bay any imperfections on the external panels are rectified, while in another area the internal panels are locked into a series of jigs and welded together to produce the basic body-chassis structure. The rear guards, rocker panels, cowl, and upper back panel, together with front and rear aprons, are also welded in place, after which the front guards are bolted aboard and the doors hung. Following lead-loading of some seams and final metal-finishing, the body-chassis unit is virtually complete — but still naked in its bare metal. From the body shop it is trolled across to the main paint shop where with other BMC vehicles it passes through the RotoDip system to be thoroughly and entirely coated with rust-resistant paint. This is another area where local assembly scores over imported models. Rust-proofing of British-produced MGs still consists only of conventional dunking in a tank — a method that BMC Australia says is definitely inferior to RotoDip.

Emerging from the rust-proofing process, the now chocolate-brown shell is under-proofed for sound-damping and further protection against corrosion before proceeding to the paint shop proper where it is primed and colored. The RotoDip and paint shop (aside from the Hot-Run department) are the only places where the MG fraternises with its sedan and commercial relatives during assembly, though its seats, hood and suchlike are produced in the trim shop along with equivalent items for all the other vehicles.

With its paint finish checked out, the shell is returned to the sports car plant which is separate from the main factory blocks and, in addition to the body shop, accommodates the sportsters' own

assembly line. In striking contrast to the assembly lines from which the sedans and commercials roll (where the lines themselves move and so do the assemblers, but quick), the MGs are pushed from station to station as each stage of assembly is completed. Instead of the typical assembly-line situation where each man does only one or two jobs on each car, the roadsters are put together by relatively fewer men, each of whom performs a much greater number of operations. Of course no time is wasted, but since the assemblers do not have to keep up with a self-moving line, and because they have a wider, more varied range of tasks to fulfil, assembly proceeds with considerably more care and expertise than is evident on normal production lines of BMC or any other mass-manufacturer.

Passing along the initial stages of the assembly line, each G is accompanied by its own multi-shelved bin containing much of the paraphernalia that goes into a car. As it is moved successively through each of the 14 stations on the assembly line, so it becomes progressively more complete. In practice it travels an S-shaped route. Along the first leg most of the minor items (head and tail lights, dash panel, wiring loom, hydraulics, windows) are fitted. Moving across to second leg, shell is lowered on to its complete front and rear suspensions, after which it receives the engine/transmission and remainder of its running gear. By the time it reaches the end of this track the headlights have been aligned, the suspension geometry adjusted, and the engine started. The piles of formerly inanimate parts have now given birth to a mobile machine that is driven the short hop to the third leg. Here the car is driven on a set of rollers to check that everything in the drive train is operating according to plan. A very thorough final inspection follows before the car is allowed out the door to be tested on a wavy and corrugated strip that is designed to reveal any rattles or other loosenesses that may be present. When everything checks out satisfactorily the MG is taken to the car park to await delivery to a dealer and thence to its buyer.