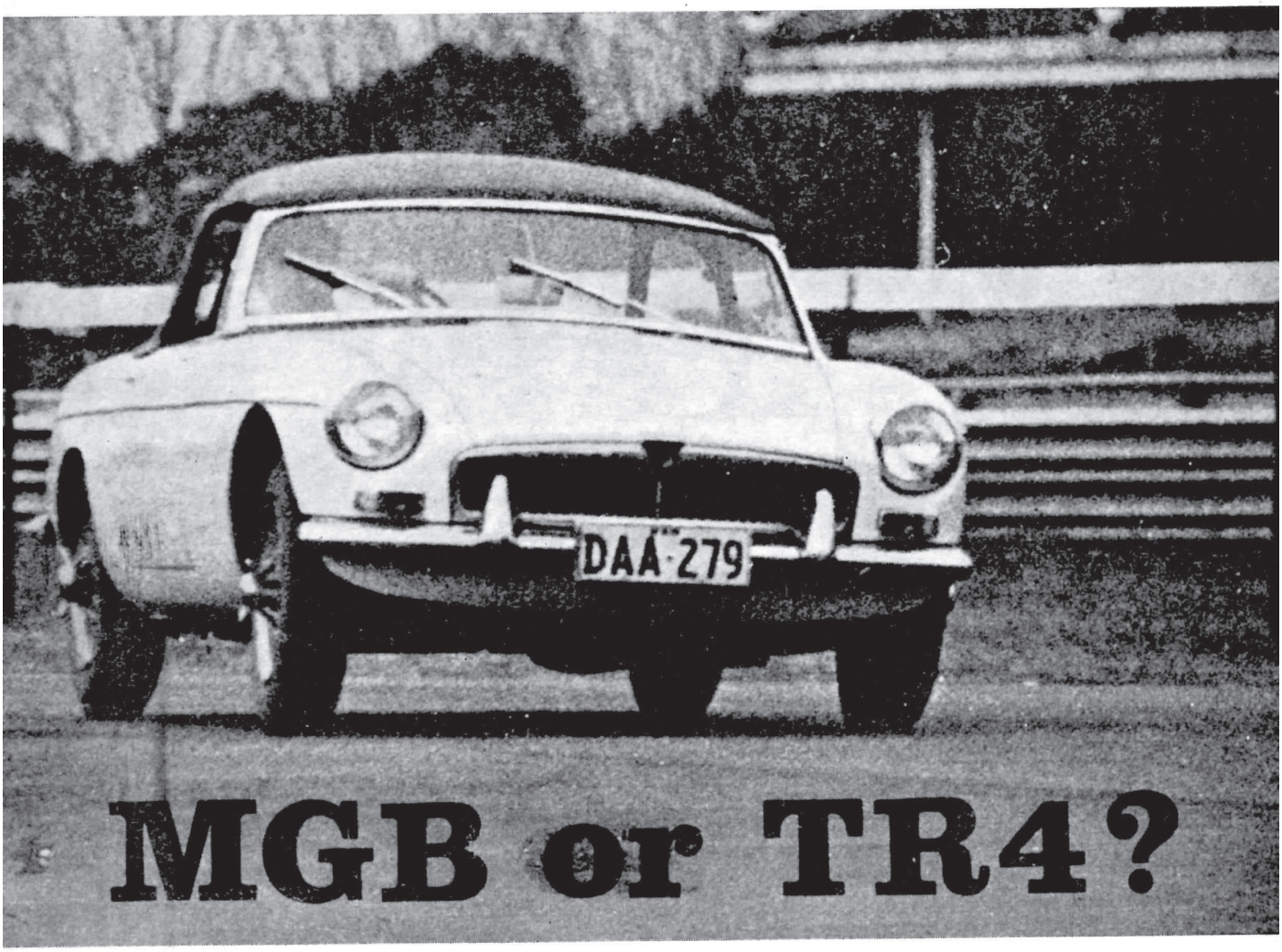


MGB or TR4?

COMPARISON ANALYSIS

Enthusiasts all over the world want to know how the MGB compares with the TR4. So did we. Here is our unbiased report and findings.

By CHRIS BECK

WHEN Standard Triumph International released the TR4 in 1961 an entirely new concept of the words "sports car" infiltrated the lower and middle class price bracket. For here was a vehicle which broke away from the traditional thoughts associated with this type of motoring by providing wind-up windows, sensible high sided doors, and a soft ride. Almost immediately there were people saying that the TR series was no longer a sports car and that American comfort-seekers had managed to convert good old English know-how and design.

What many people didn't realise was that while STI was after a bigger share of the US market it had also built a much better car than its predecessor.

Soon BMC stepped on to the platform with the MGB, which is more or less a direct competitor with the TR4. It appeared almost a year after the release of the TR4.

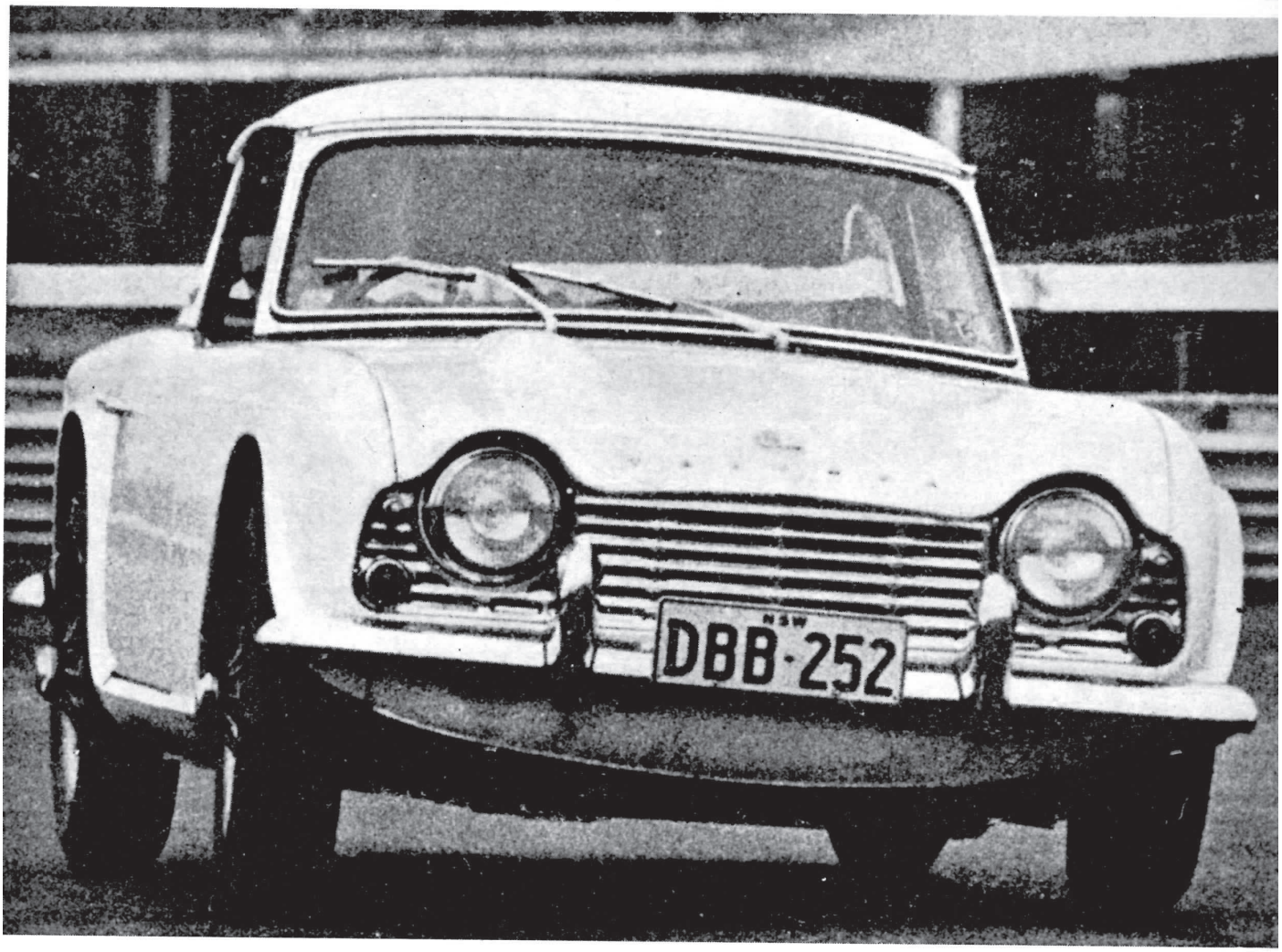
Naturally we were extremely interested in this latest creation from Abingdon-on-Thames and like most car-lovers began to wonder how it stacked up against the TR4. Was it as good? Was it worse? Was it better?

Every young man contemplating buying a medium-priced sports car with a peppery performance inevitably had this comparison to contend with. Since the introduction of TRs and MGs they have virtually never been on such an even parity, in their basic forms, as both are now in the same price and performance categories.

Again and again we found ourselves mentally comparing the MGB to the TR4, or the TR4 to the MGB.

So we obtained a standard MGB without any garnishings and with the help of AMI we borrowed a TR4 with a semi-detachable hardtop, wire wheels and electric overdrive.

In profile it is easy to see the MG is a smaller and more compact vehicle. The bodywork slopes and is rounded a little more than the angular panels and squared-off look of the TR. From the front both show the influences of English and Italian designers — the basic design for the TR4 came from Giovanni Michelotti — and as well



as being handsome they are fairly functional. As has always been the case with TRs, the 4 is a rugged, square-jawed car while the B follows the A with more subtle, flowing lines.

The TR has a large flat bonnet which hinges forward to give access to the motor. On the right hand side there is a bulge for the carburettors and at the front there are two small lips which house the top of the headlamps, set in the stainless steel grille. The large frontal area obviously slows the car down in the higher speed bracket.

Michelotti has not followed the TR tradition of scalloped doors, but gave them a straight upper edge and fitted locking push button door handles. Like the front, the tail is neatly angular with a bench-type boot lid and a small fin on either side, which incorporate the brake, parking and blinker assemblies. In true TR fashion the snap action filler cap is situated in the middle of the car, immediately behind the cockpit.

Unlike the Triumph, the B has less frontal area and seems to have more rounded, aerodynamic lines. A curved bonnet slopes down to a small vertically-slatted grille and the headlights are set back into the mudguards, Floride-fashion. For such a small and short sports car the MG has amazingly large and wide opening doors operated by pull-type exterior handles. BMC, in the interests of standardisation has given the car the same rear end styling as the Mk 2A Sprite.

The interior of both cars was in red and black. The bucket seats were trimmed in red vinyl. Those in the TR4 gave better lateral support under hard cornering, but in the MG they were softer and would be more comfortable on a long trip.

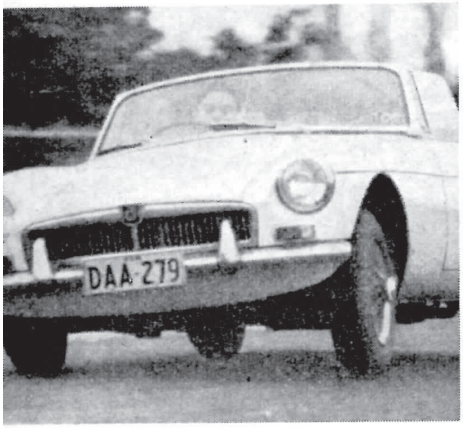
In both vehicles the floors were covered with rubber matting which, although elementary, was highly practical; the transmission tunnels and the areas behind the seats were carpeted. Safety belt anchorages were standard fittings on both.

Inside, the TR4 seems more cramped than the B so entry and exit is a little more difficult because of the narrower doors. The interior handles of the MG were plastic which did not look as strong or as durable as the chromium plated steel ones in the TR. The MG used a pull-up ratchet type handbrake while the Four uses a fly-off lever type — both held the cars well on a steep downgrade.

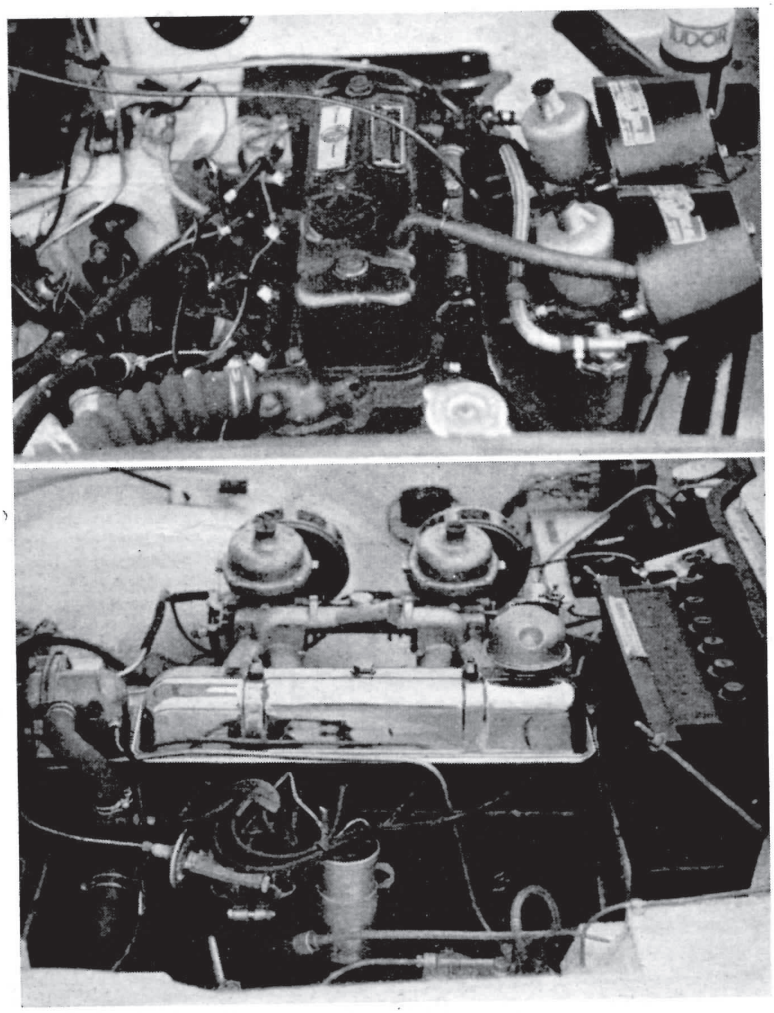
On the question of instrument panels it was hard to judge because both did their jobs so well. In the TR there was a large speedometer and matching 6000 rpm tachometer and oil pressure, water temperature, fuel and amp gauges. Missing from the B was the ammeter, but the tachometer ran to 7000 rpm. Push/pull switches were used to control the wipers, headlights, windscreen washers and choke on the TR, but I preferred the toggle switches in the MG. They were light in action and needed only to be brushed.

Turn blinkers on both cars were self-cancelling

MGB OR



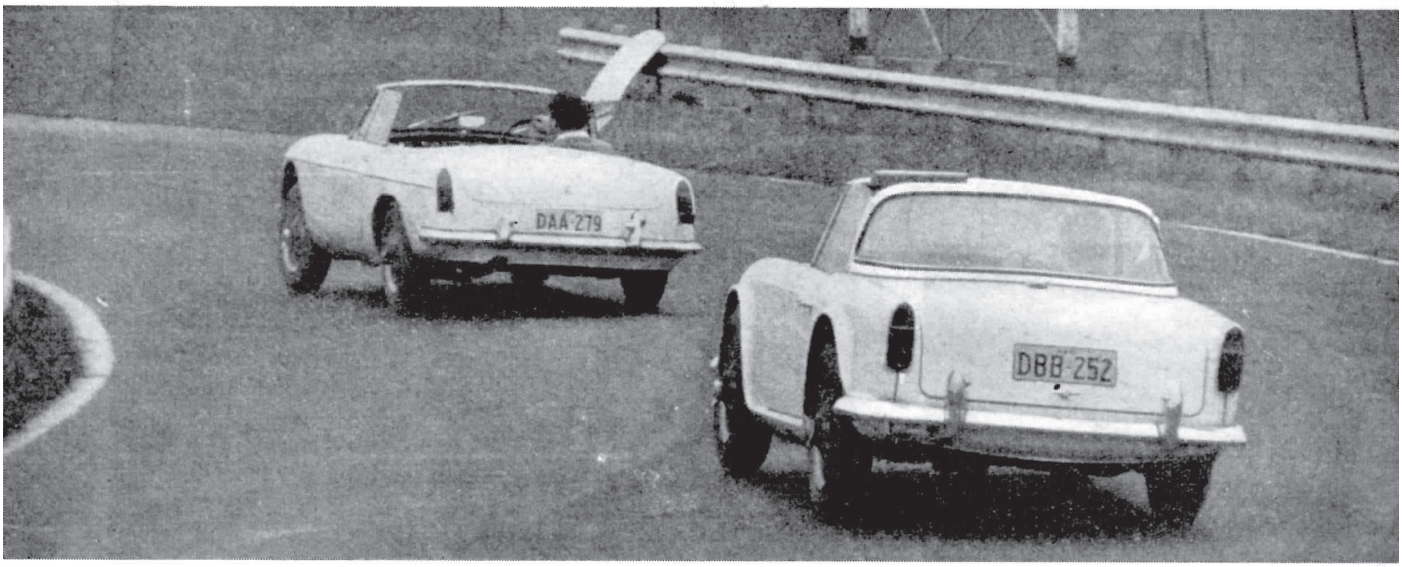
TR4? Continued



Both power units are fours. The Triumph uses twin Stromberg carburettors; the MG is fed by 1.5 in SUs. Compartment layout and finish is better in TR4.

Lines of the MGB are rounder and the tail-lights are the same as those used on the Mk2A Sprite. The MG's petrol filler cap is in an awkward position. Designed by Michelotti the

TR4 has a squarer look and more boot locker space and the snap type filler is sensibly located in the middle of the rear panel.



A faster cornering car, the B has less body roll than the TR. The Triumph's bigger motor enables it to accelerate slightly harder.

and the wipers parked automatically. Three air vents gave a constant flow of air into the cockpit of the TR, but the MG lacked this refinement.

Three-spoked steering wheels were used in each car with the horn set in the central boss. The TR's steering column can be easily adjusted to suit the driver and it telescopes in the event of an accident, but the MG's is fixed. In both cars there was a good range of fore and aft movement in the seats, but in the MG I found I had to bend my arms so the seat would be far enough forward for my feet to operate the pedals. In the TR this was obviated by the adjustment of the steering column and so a more comfortable, straight arm driving position could be adopted.

As far as finish was concerned the TR4 led by a good length, its interior and exterior just seemed to have a little something the B lacked. The instrument panel on the B, though easier to read, was not nearly as well put together; STI have done an excellent job on the TR dash. Although quite well finished on the exterior the B was not in the same garage as the TR4, which had better paintwork and the body panels fitted without any ridges or bumps. The Triumph has a greater feeling of opulence and snob-appeal and it is not only the extra gauges on the dash that distinguish it as being the more expensive of the two cars. Throughout it is finished in a manner to which we have become accustomed to from Standard Triumph.

Under the bonnets both motors conform to the same basic configuration. Each has four under-square cylinders and three main bearings, but they differ vastly in many other respects. The BMC unit has a capacity of 1798 cc and the cylinders are siamesed in pairs while the Triumph 2138 cc powerplant has all wet liners. Of course, the STI unit develops more bhp — 105 at 4600 rpm — than the MG's 94 bhp at 5500 rpm. Torque is also superior — 127 ft/lb at 3350 rpm as against 110 ft/lb at 3000 rpm, but the MG is slightly more tractable in city traffic and can idle down to 10 mph in top gear and then pick up again without snatch. On the 9 to 1 compression ratio the Triumph did not complain and the MG was equally at home on its 8.8 ratio, but like the majority of cars of this make it ran-on badly. This could be stopped by pushing the accelerator to the floor as the engine was turned off.

Until recently both motors were fitted with 1.75 in SU carburettors, but on the latest model Triumphs twin Stromberg 175CDs raise the horsepower rating. Both engines rev freely—the TR had a ceiling of 5000 rpm because all torque advantage was lost if it was taken any higher. With a lead-foot, the B would spin to 6300 before complications set in and the valves began to chatter.

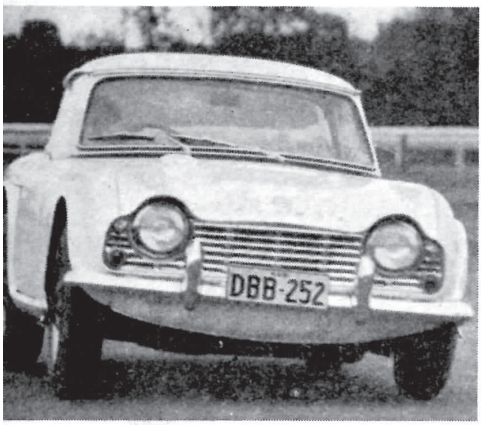
Consequently the Triumph had longer legs and could outrun the B, although there is not that much between them. The TR4 is only fractionally faster to 50 mph and has a top speed of 112 mph—five miles per hour faster than the B. Power and torque in the TR seem very even and its hard to tell when the cam comes in, but in the MG work begins around 2250 rpm. Below this figure it just trundles along nicely.

At speed in the B, even with the hood down and windows wound up, the occupants were wind blown, while at the same speed in the TR it was only a little blustery. Erecting the hood on the MG was quite a job and this is one point where the Triumph scored admirably. Its hood, or Surrey top, takes about 30 sec to put in place with push button studs. The whole rear window of the car is a permanent fixture and the soft top is fastened to the front of it and the leading edge of the windscreen.

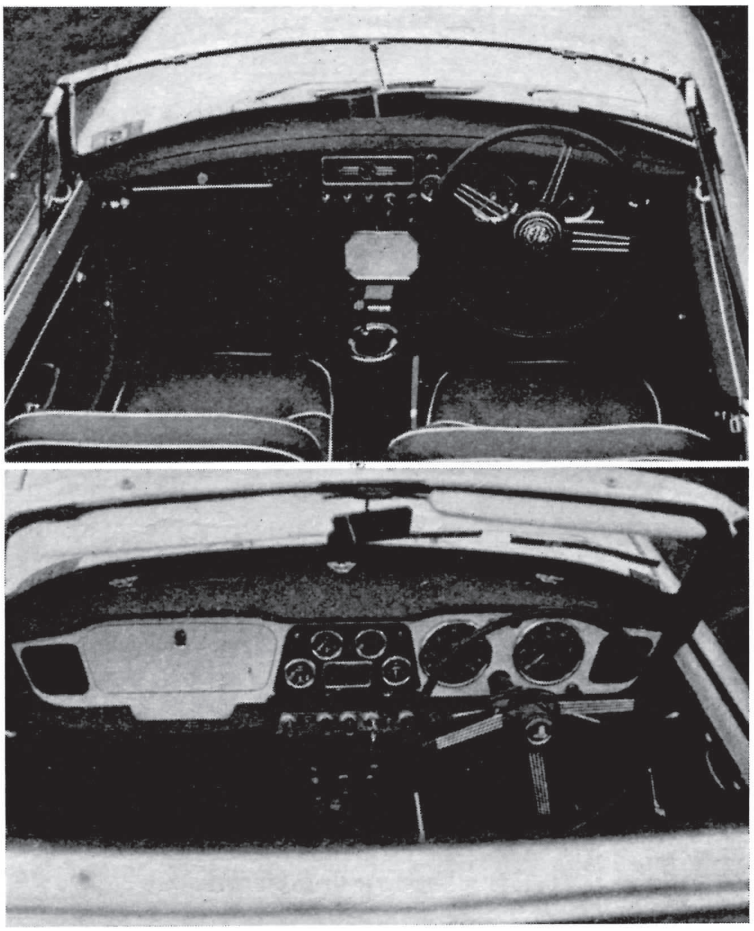
In the gearbox section the B leads confidently. BMC recently acquired the rights to produce baulk ring synchromesh, so blindingly fast shifts, can be made without clashing the gears. All ratios are well spaced, although it could probably be better still if first and second ran out a little higher. Unlike the TR4 there is no synchromesh on first — a pity because it is sometimes needed in city traffic. Changes in the TR can be made quickly, but it is possible to beat the synchromesh and produce unwanted, expensive grating noises. Compensation is provided by the Laycock de Normanville electric overdrive, which is well geared and can be cut in and out instantaneously by a stalk switch on the right hand side of the steering column. This lifts the gearbox immeasurably and provides seven distinct ratios.

Steering on the TR was light, spongey and evasive while that on the MG was heavy, solid

TR4 OR



MGB? Continued



Cockpits of both are extremely practical. Gear lever placement is better in the B. Instruments are easy to read in both cases.

and direct. Both cars have fairly small turning circles and less than three turns of the steering wheels are needed to bring both from lock-to-lock. After a few miles hard driving in the B, my arms became quite tired, but this was not the case with the TR.

Both cars use the disc/drum brake combination. And there was very little to chose between them. I had the feeling that B's system was slightly superior to that on the TR because it pulled the car up quicker under all conditions. Under hard continuous braking the TR's were inclined to be a little fussy and occasionally one of the front discs locked for a moment, but easing the pressure a little released it.

Suspension on both cars is virtually the same type with wishbones, coil springs and telescopic dampers on the front and a rigid axle attached to semi-elliptic springs and piston type shock absorbers at the rear. Although both are basically the same they have been developed to give different results. Ride in the MGB is softer than that of the TR, which, like its predecessors, has a certain choppiness. On rough surfaces the MG was definitely the better car. When driven hard both cars handled entirely differently — the B understeered at first and then broke away to a definite final oversteer while the TR kicked the tail out at all times. Lining either car up for a fast corner was no problem and even if one overcooked it, or changed one's line in the middle of a curve, difficulties were rarely encountered. Whereas the TR4 broke away quickly and drifted smoothly, the MGB understeered just a little at first, then switched its attitude to a positive oversteer. Although the driver had to work hard the car was extremely easy to control at all times. The MGB seemed to hang on a little longer in the corners and its oversteer was not quite as pronounced as that on the TR4. Boiling it all down we found that the MGB was appreciably quicker through a given corner than the TR.

During the test for this story we took both cars to Warwick Farm and drove them at racing speeds around the short circuit. After a few laps to familiarise myself with the track, and the best points to brake, accelerate, set the car up for a corner and so forth I drove both cars around as hard as I could. The MGB was consistently 2.5 seconds faster than the TR4.

Pedal operation on both cars was light to medium and the clutch pedals did not tire one's legs. One big fault with the MGB was that there was no place, other than the clutch pedal, to rest one's left leg. The dimmer switch on the MG was also awkward to operate.

All in all both cars seem pretty even, but then there is the final big question — price? The standard MGB sells for £1365 while the TR4, as tested sells for more than £1800. Which is the best value for money? Again, this is a difficult question to answer. In many ways the TR is a much more refined vehicle than the MG, but if you add another £250 to the Triumph's price you can buy a cheap version of the Daimler SP250.

The TR has more prestige value and is probably an excellent example of a status symbol. Really the whole thing hinges on your salary. Which can you afford, the MGB or the TR4? #

MGB

SPECIFICATIONS

CHASSIS AND BODY DIMENSIONS:

Wheelbase	7 ft 7¾ in
Track, front	4 ft 2 in
Track, rear	4 ft 2 in
Turning circle	30 ft
Overall length	12 ft 9¾ in
Overall height	4 ft 1¼ in

CHASSIS:

Steering, type	rack and pinion
Brake, type	disc front, drum rear
Suspension, front:	independent, wishbones, coil springs
Suspension, rear:	rigid axle, semi-elliptic springs
Shock absorbers	telescopic
Tyre size	5.90 x 14
Weight	18½ cwt
Fuel tank capacity	10 gals

ENGINE:

Cylinders	four, in line
Bore and stroke	80 mm by 88.9 mm
Cubic capacity	1789 cc
Compression ratio	8.8 to 1
Fuel requirement	95 octane
Valves	pushrod overhead
Maximum power	94 bhp at 5500 rpm
Maximum torque	110 ft/lb at 3000 rpm

TRANSMISSION:

Overall ratios:	
First	14.11
Second (synchro)	8.66
Third (synchro)	5.37
Fourth (synchro)	3.91
Final drive	1 to 1

PERFORMANCE

Top speed average	106 mph
Fastest run	107 mph
Maximum, first	30 mph
Maximum, second	51 mph
Maximum, third	84 mph
Standing quarter mile average	18.8 sec
0 to 30 mph	3.3 sec
0 to 40 mph	5.7 sec
0 to 50 mph	7.8 sec
0 to 60 mph	11.3 sec
0 to 70 mph	15.2 sec
0 to 80 mph	19.8 sec
0 to 90 mph	31.5 sec
Brake fade resistance on test hill	96 percent

TR4

SPECIFICATIONS

CHASSIS AND BODY DIMENSIONS:

Wheelbase	7 ft 4 in
Track, front	4 ft 2 in
Track, rear	4 ft 1 in
Ground clearance	6 in
Turning circle	34 ft
Overall length	13 ft
Overall width	4 ft 10 in
Overall height	4 ft 2 in

CHASSIS:

Steering, type	rack and pinion
Brake, type	disc front, drum rear
Suspension, front:	independent, wishbones, coil springs
Suspension, rear:	rigid axle, semi-elliptic springs
Shock absorbers	telescopic
Tyre size	5.90 by 15
Weight	19½ cwt
Fuel tank capacity	11¾ gals

ENGINE:

Cylinders	four, in line
Bore and stroke	86 mm by 92 mm
Cubic capacity	2138 cc
Compression ratio	9 to 1
Fuel requirement	95 octane
Valves	pushrod overhead
Maximum power	100 bhp at 4600 rpm
Maximum torque	127 ft/lb at 3350 rpm

TRANSMISSION:

Overall ratios:	
First (synchro)	11.61
Second (synchro)	7.43
Third (synchro)	4.9
Fourth (synchro)	3.7
Final drive	1 to 1

PERFORMANCE

Top speed average	110 mph
Fastest run	112 mph
Maximum, first	31 mph
Maximum, second	54 mph
Maximum, third	81 mph
Standing quarter mile average	18.4 sec
0 to 30 mph	3.4 sec
0 to 40 mph	5.5 sec
0 to 50 mph	7.5 sec
0 to 60 mph	10.9 sec
0 to 70 mph	14.7 sec
0 to 80 mph	18.8 sec
0 to 90 mph	25.9 sec
Brake fade resistance on test hill	94 percent