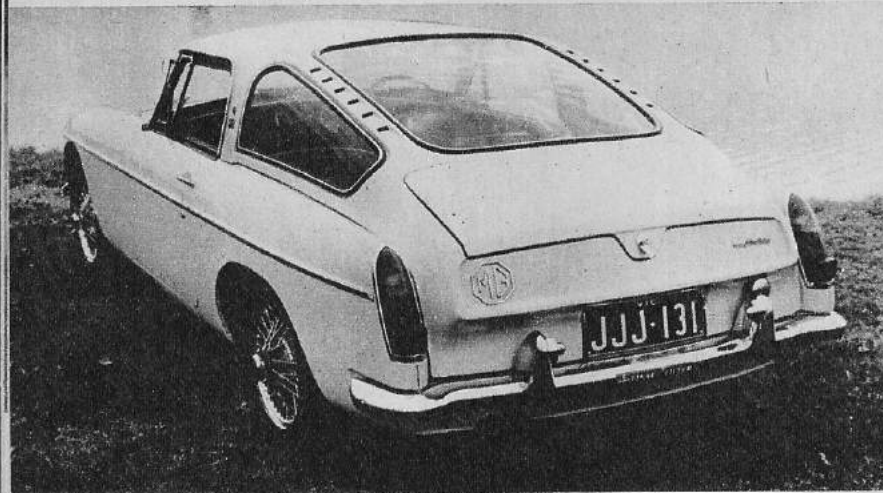


*ABOVE: This effort by International Styling of Melbourne is an eye-catcher, but lack of ventilation could be quite a problem in summer.*



modern  
**MOTOR**  
SPECIAL  
TEST

# 3

**F**ASTBACKS are the IN thing these days—like op art, Pepsi, Barbra Streisand, and long hair (on males, that is).

The appeal of the fastback is—to most people—purely visual. Rakish, sleek, and only a little less practical in its better forms than the conventional body, the fastback turns heads wherever you go.

But there's more to it than that. The main benefit of the fastback, from an engineering point of view, is the better air penetration achieved, and subsequent increase in top speed, and reduction in fuel consumption. Well that's what the fastback aficionados claim, anyway.

We recently tried three fastback variations on the theme of MGB. Two were local conversions, the third, a genuine BMC factory fastback.

Fastback No. 1 is produced in

*LEFT: J and S Fibreglass of Sydney did this one — note boot air vents. BELOW: British factory-made MGB-GT is the best of the lot—but costs will keep it off our market.*

**Three variations —two Australian, one British —on a familiar theme: how to make an MGB look sleeker and maybe go faster. Barry Cooke compares them and gives his findings**



# fastbacks

Melbourne by International Body Styling. Our example came from the N.S.W. distributor, BMC Sports Car Centre, Blakehurst. Cost of a new MGB equipped with this fibreglass fastback is \$3330 or \$490 more than the list price of a "B" roadster.

For the extra money a buyer gets a nicely styled fastback, perspex headlight covers, and seating rearranged to provide additional headroom, and with the squabs set up so that they tilt forward to provide access to the rear compartment.

The main drawback of this top is that there is no outside access to the rear luggage compartment.

Luggage (and spare wheel) must be removed through the passenger compartment — a fairly clumsy arrangement, unfortunately.

Overall finish is good, although fibreglassing around the rear side-windows leaves something to be desired.

It may improve with later production.

The test car had a fairly high level of noise, due largely to a distinct diff rumble. More sound insulation is definitely needed to supple-

ment the black carpeting provided in the conversion.

Weatherproofing wasn't complete by any means. The windscreen leaked in heavy rain, and the roof guttering — which served more as decoration than anything else—spilled water over the edge and through the windows—if they were open.

Rearward visibility was greatly assisted by an outside rear-view mirror. Visibility over the right shoulder was good, but not so good over the left shoulder.

In rain, the nature of the perspex rear window and its almost horizontal rake caused water to bead without running off, and thus hampered vision to the rear quite markedly.

Generally speaking though, this fastback conversion is good. Aesthetically it is pleasing, and if it falls down in small details it makes up for it in sideways glances.

No bachelor car can afford to be without one!

## Sydney effort

Fastback No. 2 is produced by J. and S. Fibreglass in Sydney. It is less of a compromise in that it has a

separate boot opening, which greatly facilitates spare wheel removal and luggage stowage.

Headroom is not quite as generous as the International Styling version, but I feel the J. and S. job doesn't make quite as good use of seating variations as it could.

Practicality of the J. and S. fastback is further improved by the provision of air extractor vents in the rear window struts. They greatly help interior ventilation at speeds up to 60 mph. Above that speed their function is reversed, and they actually pressurise the cockpit.

Aesthetically it's not quite as pleasing (to us anyway). The main points of contention are the overuse of small gold-colored badges referring to the maker's and designer's name.

We grant they are worthy of mention—but a little less fussily.

Finish is quite superb—far and away the best local fibreglassing I've ever seen. What's more, it is—at \$480—\$10 cheaper than the other.

This conversion appeals to us more because the bulkhead between cockpit and boot is left intact—which probably helps body rigidity and certainly lowers noise level.

Unfortunately, we weren't able to do a direct comparison of noise levels because the BMC Sports Car Centre car was stock standard, while the J. and S. car had been modified mechanically and used a noisy, non-standard twin-stack muffler.

## Factory version

Our interest (and yours) in Fastback No. 3 is purely academic. It's the factory-produced MGB 2-plus-2 which WON'T be sold in Australia.

BMC have one car here—for evaluation. Unhappily for us, their evaluation indicated that the car would be too expensive to warrant local production.

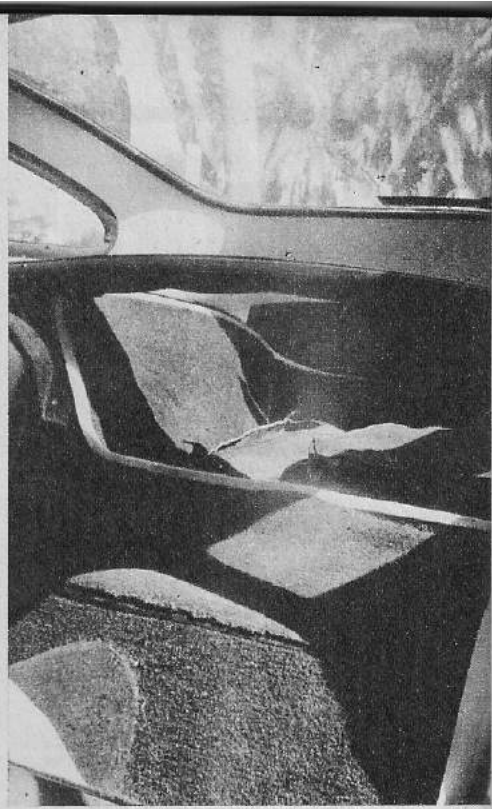
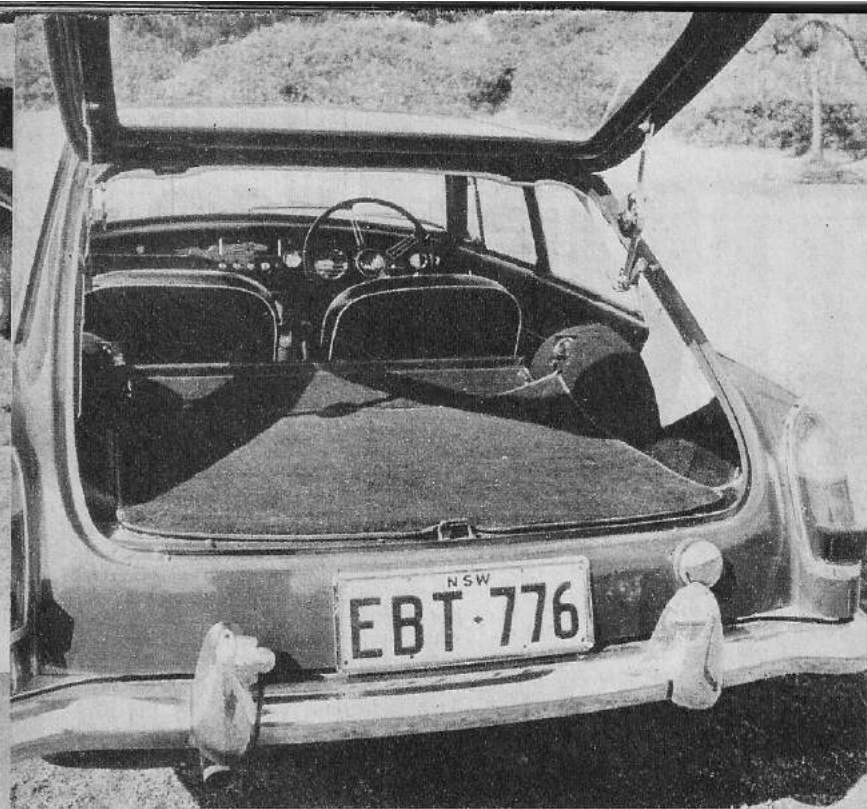
Cost of fully imported versions would be prohibitive.

Anyway, we begged a loan of the 2-plus-2 to do an evaluation of our own and to see how the local versions stood up in comparison.

All things considered, they stood up reasonably well. When comparing, it's important to remember that the local versions are converted roadsters—and consequently considerably less rigid in construction than the factory job.







## 3 fastbacks

The extra rigidity of the factory car improved roadability a lot.

Naturally, it is a far more satisfactory arrangement than either of the others—but we hasten to point out again that it definitely won't be available in Australia. Pity.

There is a very, very occasional rear seat that folds flat to supplement the rear luggage compartment. This seat is OK for small children—I tried my three-year-old daughter and she had plenty of room. Six or seven-year-olds would be just about the limit, I think.

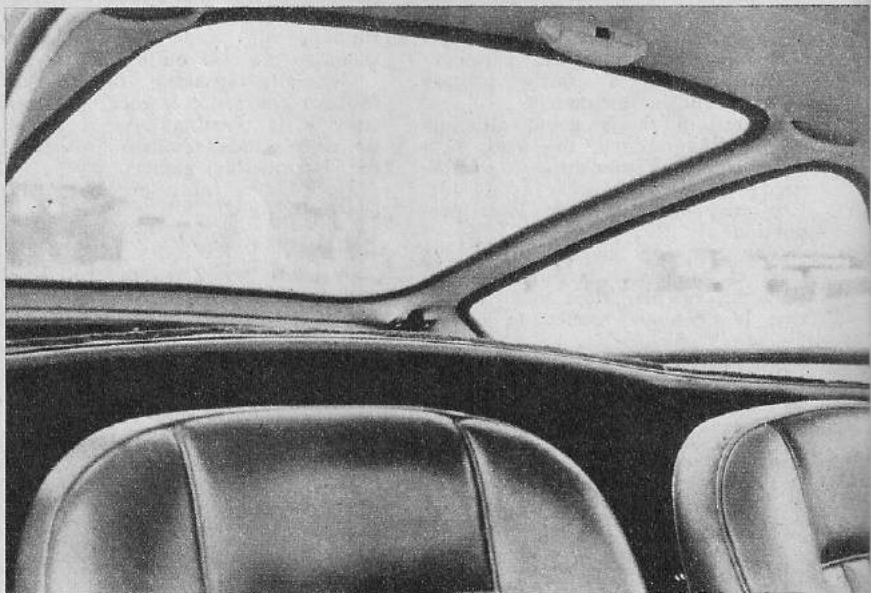
Certainly, it's out of the question for adults.

Access to the rear luggage bay is through a top-hinged, counter-balanced tailgate-type door.

One of the most pleasing features of the MGB-GT (that's what they call it at the factory) is the greatly improved sound-proofing. There's not nearly as much engine, gearbox or diff noise from this car as from the other two.

Noise reduction was abetted in this instance by an optional electric overdrive that reduced engine revs by about 25 percent. Dunlop SP41 tyres were also fitted and they made a tremendous difference to the car's handling. BMC fit conventional tyres to the roadster and they're not nearly as good.

Styling-wise, the GT is more a compromise than either of the others—simply because the designers have made an effort to fit a rear seat. For this reason, it turned fewer heads, although I personally felt it was a much better looking car.



**TOP LEFT:** Factory car's back door opens wide, small rear seat folds down to give excellent luggage room. **TOP RIGHT:** Inside International Styling's car. **ABOVE and BELOW:** Air outlets on the J and S car.

