

MGB VERSUS TORANA XU-1



SCW ACTION COMPARISON:

Compare an MGB to a Torana XU-1? Too right, mate — remember, there's only \$34 difference in the prices (at \$3559 the Torana's now the dearer). But that's the secondary point. The guts of the matter is the fact that the B and the XU-1 epitomise the transformation

that's hit the performance car market lately—the steady replacement of the soft-top sportie by big-engined, fat-wheeled versions of the family sedan as the go image car. Ten years ago the MG was THE young bloke's performance car. Now, you recommend





MGB VERSUS TORANA XU-1

one to a go-freak kid and he'll laugh his head off . . . all the way down to his GM dealer's for an XU-1.

Sad, maybe, for the traditionalists (and people like Leyland and Jensen-Healey). But that's the way it is.

Anyway, we thought it about time we had a good look at this turn-about, and in particular the cars involved. So we're going to bring you a series of comparisons over the next few months under the heading "Finding the *real* sports cars of the Seventies".

Following on from this month's MGB/Torana confrontation — No 1 in the series — we hope to be putting cars like Spitfires, Clubmen GTs, Morgans, Charger RTs, Bolwell Sports, Falcon GTs, Alfa Spiders, Datsun 240Zs, TR6s, Holden SSs, Lotuses, Capris, Jensen-Healeys, Mazda Capellas, E-types, Monaros, Fiats and even the odd Dino and Porsche under the microscope.

One thing's for sure — if the results of our Torana/MG bit are an indication, we'll all be in for plenty of surprises.

Obviously, the engine sizes and types of the cars compared in the series will differ greatly — the MGB and Torana demonstrate that.

These two cars, in fact, really typify the two sides of our argument. The B is a traditional-type sports car, soft-top, small engine, hard suspension, rack-and-pinion steering, designed to sell on a fun, outdoor-type image. The Torana, on the other hand, as one of the new breed, has a mass-production family sedan body with a big engine shoe-horned into it, suspension beefed up to provide the necessary handling, bright colors and things like spoilers to provide the right mean, performance image.

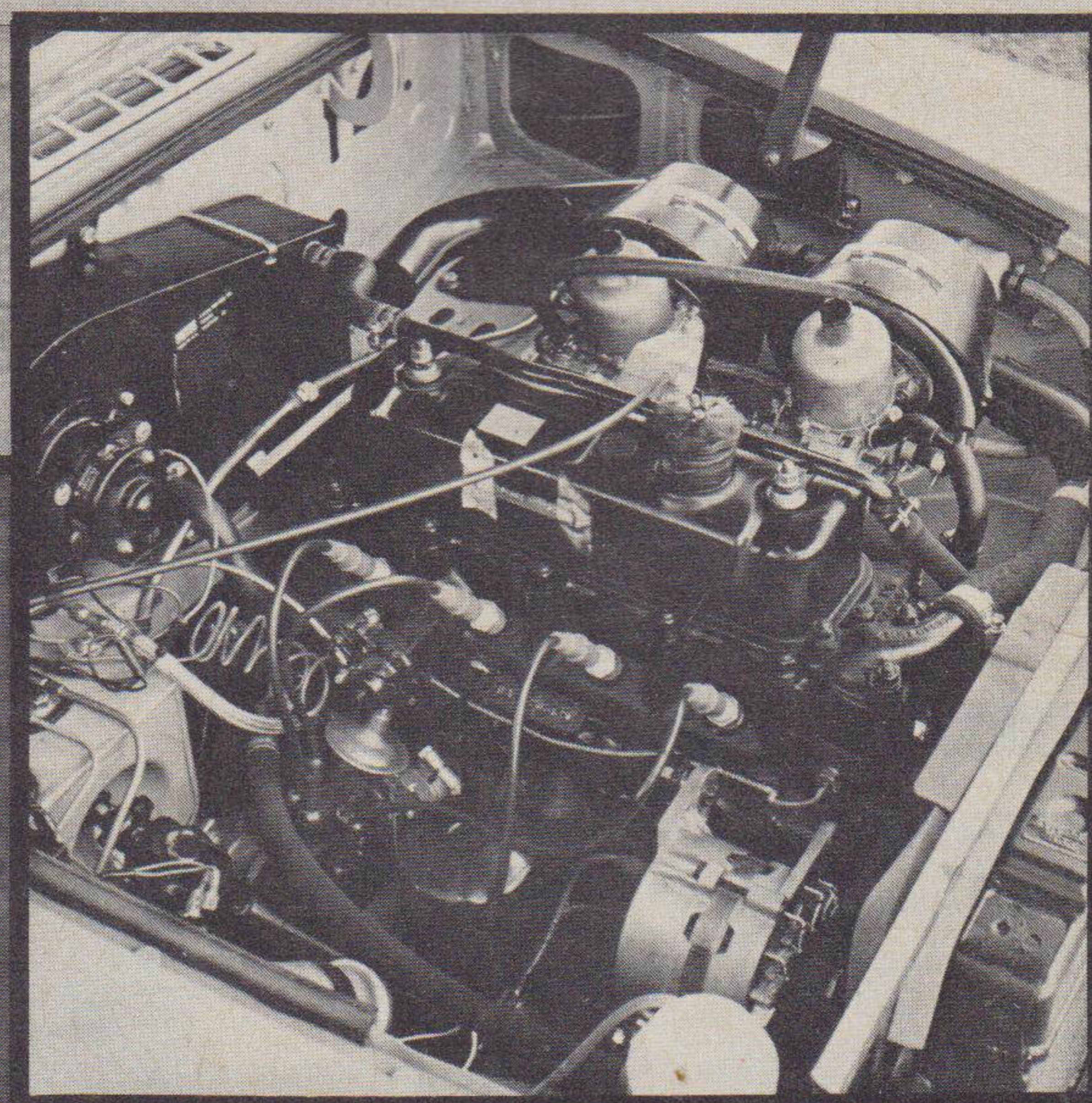
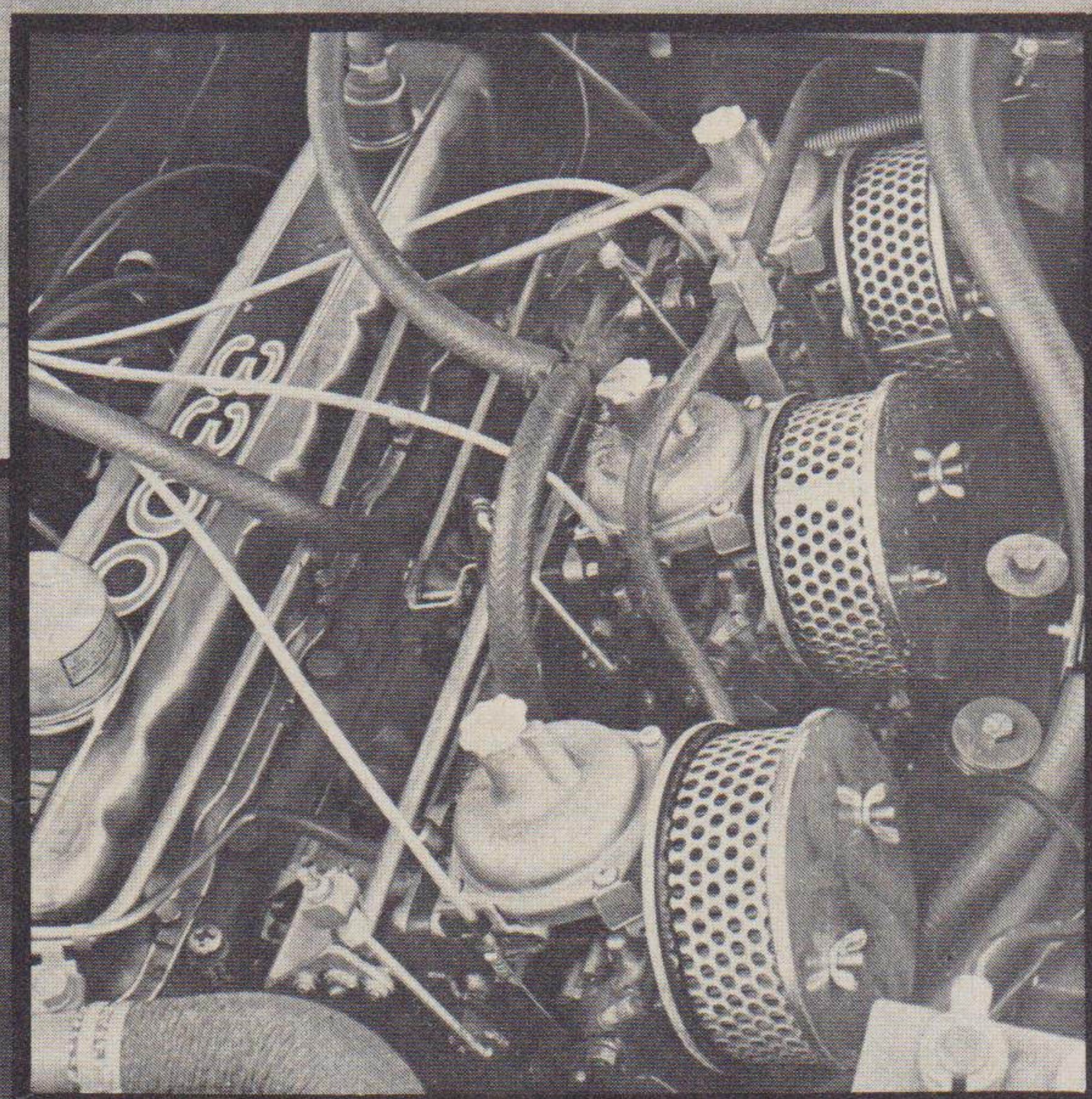
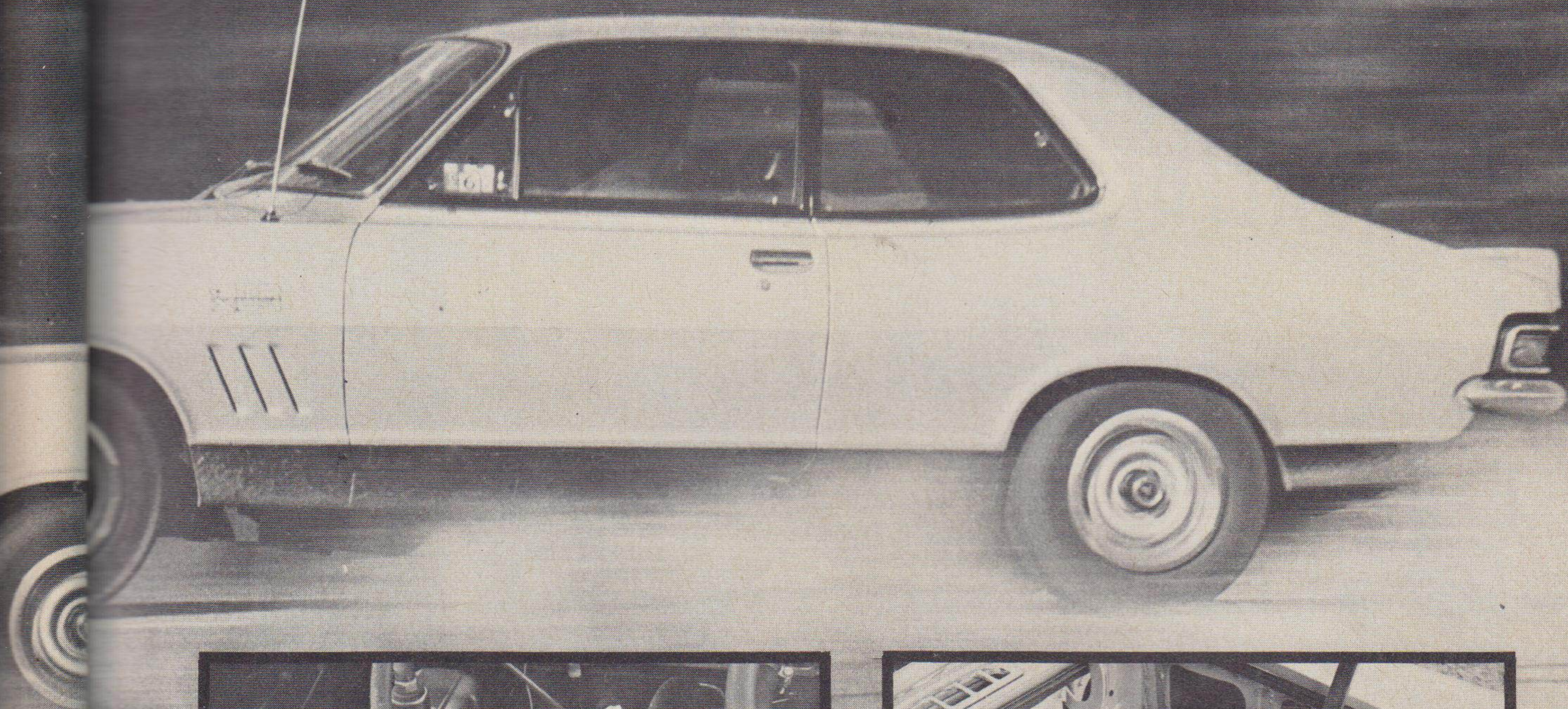
Look at the two engines — the B's can be traced back almost to time immemorial and the days of the spindly-legged T-series MGs. Its development came up through the ranks of the MGA, so that it's a very conventional, staid engine. But a strong, reliable one. Faithful.

With a low 8.8 to one compression in the 1798 cc (109 CID) four that's fed by two SU carbies you get a quiet 95 bhp at 5400 rpm. That's certainly nothing to write home about, though the torque reading of 110 lb/ft at 3000 rpm is better and gives a clue to the engine — it's a smooth, strong plodder that in its stock form doesn't like to rev much at all. Hence it gives the B marvellous city tractability and makes it easy for your bird to drive, but leave the car gasping for breath when you're out on the open road and trying to dice with something . . . like an XU-1.

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PHOTOS: UWE KUESSNER. LAYOUT: ARIE HAIMOVICI.





MGB VERSUS TORANA XU-1

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Not only is the Torana's mill nearly twice as big as the MG's, but it's got exactly double the horsepower and almost twice the torque too — 190 bhp at 5600 rpm and 200 lb/ft at 4000 rpm.

The 3.3-litre (202 CID) six was developed from the stock HQ Holden mill with things like a worked head, lumpy cam and three Stromberg carbies to be a real high-revving flyer. Though it's strong and smooth down to 1800-odd revs, it thrives on a flattened throttle, running cleanly and happily to 7000 rpm if you like. We should point out here that GMH's current test XU-1 is a considerably better car than the first 202 model it had on the fleet, the one we tested in SCW May. This car's engine was far sweeter, went considerably quicker and was much quieter at high speed. But that one understeered less and was more responsive in the handling.

In acceleration and top speed there is no comparison between the B and Torana — it's very much the hare and tortoise story (except that with it's race-proven reliability the XU-1 obviously has the ability to scotch the "slow and steady" ending bit, too).

Really, the Torana has the performance a "sports car" like the B should have. Just about any family hack will knock the B off — it lays a piddling 18.5 over the quarter. But very few will match the Torana's 15.6 seconds, or 0-100 mph time of just over 24 seconds (the MG takes 29.5 seconds to get to 90...).

With this performance, a Torana owner can

confidently go looking for drag victims, fulfilling what's generally thought of as the traditional MG driver's role. The MG man has to get used to easing quietly and smoothly away on the inside lane.

But don't start writing the B off in your mind, because as we very quickly found out, it has piles of talent in other areas — enough, in fact, to embarrass the Torana in certain conditions.

Tortoise though it may be away from the lights, the Bee comes into its own as an open-road tourer.

Within its speed range, and in aesthetical, purist terms it is a better handler than the XU-1. It is infinitely more precise, more sensitive, responsive and requires practically no steering wheel movement compared with the Torana.

This all comes to the fore if it is wet. Across a mountain range on our way out of town for this test it rained. The B driver started punting along quite well, using all the power available to him in the uphill bends and maintaining a very brisk cruising speed across the tops. But he couldn't understand why the Torana was holding well back.

What he didn't know was that the Torana was hard-pushed to stay with him. It was breaking into nasty front end slides coming into bends, and losing the tail coming out. In fact, it was pretty diabolical and unpleasant to drive since it was unpredictable about which end let go first. The tyres were Dunlop Aquajets which are generally OK. Since we had similar wet weather grumbles with the earlier test car shod with Uniroyal Rallye 180s, we suspect the car, not the tyres, might be at fault. Would any owners care to write and tell of their experiences in this area?

By contrast, the B was the epitome of sensitivity and controllability.

So here the Torana's power and speed was



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negated, and for a journey through the rain we'd pick the B every time.

Coming out of the rain and back onto the dry roads, the Torana got its legs back. But even then for cruising it wasn't all that much quicker point-to-point on a normal secondary road than the MG.

The reason is that you have to work the Torana. It's a blatant understeerer unless you bring the power ON hard going through a bend. As with a mid-engined car, this tightens the nose up and sits the car down tightly on the road — very much race track handling.

And it's completely the opposite of the B. In that, you come power on into the bend, back off the throttle fractionally which immediately brings the tail edging out, then squeeze the power on again. With this very little — occasionally no — steering wheel movement is needed. The Torana would have half a turn of lock on in the same bend.

So you just tour along in the B, gently lifting off the throttle to get around bends. It's easy, super smooth and very nice.

Really, we were amazed at the B's excellent handling. In all the clamor about the power over the past couple of years we'd forgotten how good it is.

For touring, it does lose out badly to the Torana and its ilk up hills. Sitting on 85 mph, the XU-1 is right on its maximum torque band. This takes it storming up the steepest hills, generally accelerating all the way. The MG though, while holding an effortless 4000 rpm for 87 mph in top overdrive on the flat, is 1000 rpm over its peak torque range (3000 rpm) and without much left in reserve at all. So the speed needle just drops and drops up hills, with the driver having to flick out overdrive, then change back down to third.

It's a crying shame the car doesn't have more power. On a winding downhill run where handling was the optimum consideration, it stayed right on the Torana's hammer. This section demonstrated the essential difference in the road behavior of the two cars very clearly. The B was making it because of its handling ability and excellent "tightening up" response under brakes coming into the bends.

Getting from it to the XU-1, immediately pointed up the basic crudeness of the Torana's handling — it doesn't handle in the true, classical sense, but instead gets its fantastic speed around bends from exceptional roadholding and the power (as long as it's not raining).

Of the two on a winding road? The B may be much slower, but for a driver who wants precision and response it's more pleasant.

Both cars are firm riders, the B more so than the

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XU-1. Enthusiast-type motorists will find either quite acceptable for they're both really quite good considering the handling. Though it does jar sometimes, a nice point about the MG's suspension is that it works far more quietly, immediately giving it a quality feel that the Torana doesn't have.

On the dirt, for which the B was never really intended, the Torana streaks ahead, its ride here being superb and allowing comfortable 70 mph plus speeds on road like that on our cover. The B is not at all disgraced for it handles excellently and still rides reasonably comfortably. Basically, you know that it lacks the ruggedness of the Torana and aren't inclined to push it too far.

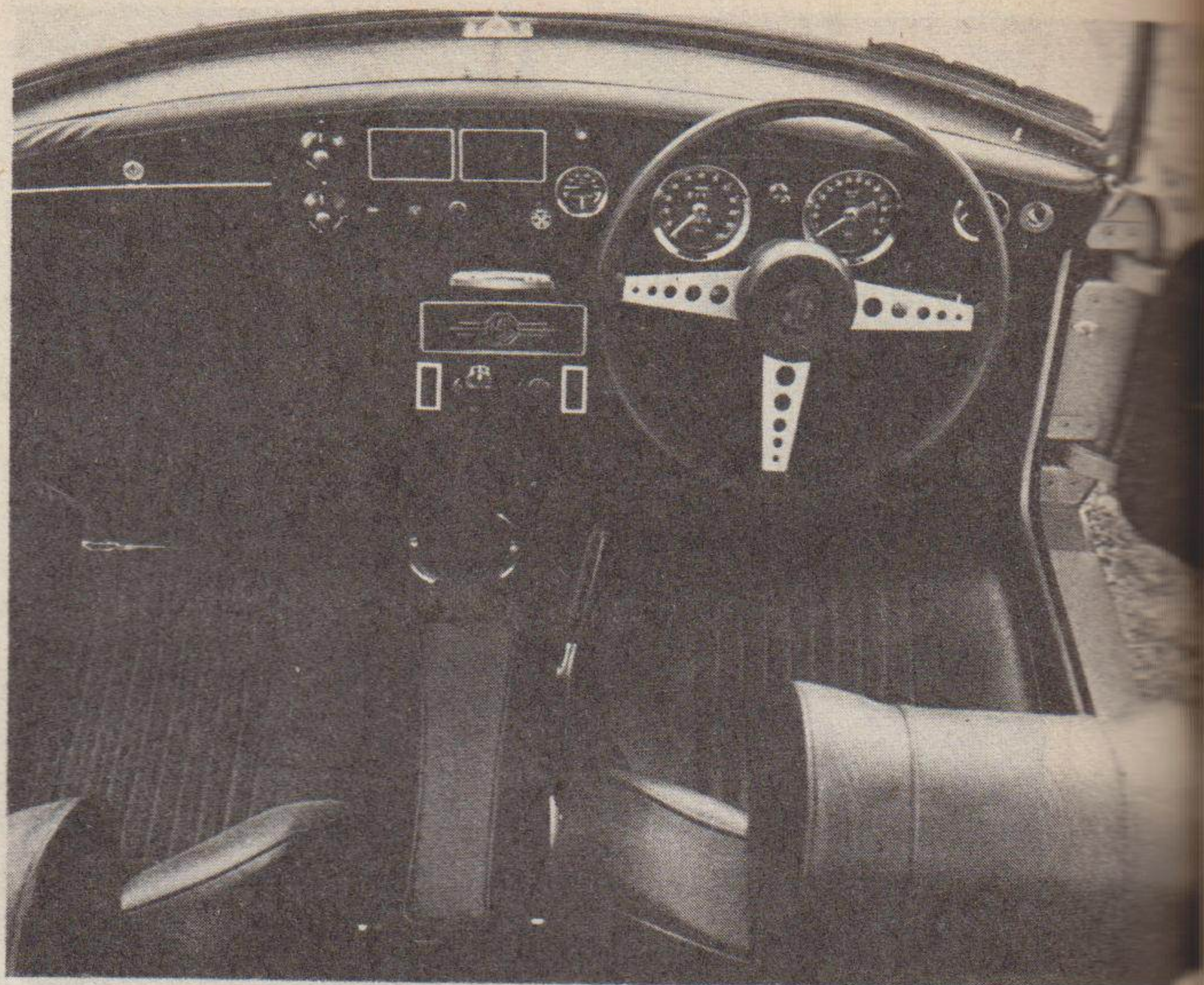
For cruising in the 85 to 95 range the MG is the quieter of the two, even allowing for wind noise. Even though this Torana was considerably quieter than the last one tested it still droned tiringly above 4200 rpm. And a lot of road noise comes through.

The B is an easy winner in comfort. It has a good driving position, excellent legroom and reach to the wheel. The seats are fine, fully-reclining and have usable headrests. The new 1972 trim gives it a central armrest, too.

The Torana seats are less comfortable, don't recline and the pedals are annoyingly offset to the right, and the wheel to the left.

Control layout on both cars is poor, but the B's are slightly easier to reach. In both, wipers and washers are major hangups. The B has the archaic system of separate wiper and washer controls, with the washer being a pump-pump job. The Torana's washers have to be pumped manually too, but at least the same knob controls the wipers.

The B's heater and vent controls are too



complicated too. Rather embarrassingly for GMH it has much, much better ventilation than the Torana with those big new dash vents.

There is a vision problem with the MG's top up. The windscreen is very shallow, restricting your view in hilly bits.

One thing that does make it a nicer car to drive, though, is its gearstick. It's easier to reach and more sensitive and pleasant to use than the General's.

The Torana has better instrumentation — with excellent lighting, it's streets ahead at night.

Headlights on both cars are good, but with a 125 mph top speed the Torana should have halogen spots fitted standard.

The spare wheel snatches a lot of the MG's boot space yet it's still quite good for a soft-top. The Torana's holds more, although the 17-gallon fuel tank grabs some of the floor area.

Of course, you can carry people in the back of the Torana (not that it's all that comfortable) and in some people's eyes this means more value for your money. The B's counter to this is the fact that its top drops, opening up a different motoring world. For short trips a third person can be perched behind the seats in the B, but normally the space is reserved for luggage, or the top folding down.

Good though the XU-1's brakes are, the MG will outrake it — it has bigger discs and drums and weighs more than 300 lb less.

The fuel check we ran on the two cars over one 166-mile stage of our 450-mile comparison shows the penalty Torana buyers pay for that performance. The six ate a gallon of super every 15.2 miles, compared to the four's 22.7 mpg.

Both cars were being driven hard over most of this distance, so you could expect around 18 to 20 mpg from the Torana at quieter speeds and 27 to 30 mpg from the B.

In town, the Torana's lighter steering makes it easier to manhandle but the B has a tighter turning circle.

In total, when you analyse the two you could be excused for thinking that their theoretical roles have taken a neat about-face. The soft-top has become more the touring car, and the sedan more the cut-and-dash sprinter.

For the guy to whom acceleration and speed is the criteria, and for the enthusiast who wants to race or run in club events, the Torana is the obvious choice — perhaps the best value of its type in the world. One point that stood out in our test was the car's fantastic safety, thanks to its incredible (dry) roadholding.

But for a driver who wants totally precise, sensit-

HOW THEY COMPARE

	MGB	TORANA XU-1
Cylinders	4	6
Capacity	1798	3310
Power	95 bhp at 5400 rpm	190 at 5600 rpm
Torque	110 lb/ft at 3000 rpm	200 at 4000 rpm
Weight	2094 lb	2422 lb
Lbs per bhp	22.0	12.7
Gear Maximums (both at 6000 rpm):		
First	32 mph	48 mph
Second	49 mph	67 mph
Third	76 mph	98 mph
Third O/D	95 mph	—
Fourth	106 mph	123 mph
Fourth O/D	105	—
Acceleration:		
0-30 mph	3.7 secs	3.4 secs
0-40 mph	5.5 secs	4.5 secs
0-50 mph	8.0 secs	6.3 secs
0-60 mph	11.5 secs	8.1 secs
0-70 mph	15.8 secs	10.4 secs
0-80 mph	21.8 secs	14.0 secs
0-90 mph	29.5 secs	17.2 secs
0-100 mph	—	24.1 secs
Standing quarter mile	18.5 secs	15.6 secs

Insurance:

	Over 25, pay cash, full no-claim bonus		Under 25, HP, no no-claim bonus	
	MGB	XU-1	MGB	XU-1
GIO	\$80.37	\$80.37	\$269.76	\$269.76
NRMA	\$251.20	\$269.80	\$437.30	\$474.50
Tariff	\$176.00	\$176.00	\$471.40	\$471.40

Total basic service costs 0 to 24,000 miles (including all oil, grease, oil filters, air filters, plugs, points and labor):

MGB	\$196.11
XU-1	\$164.24

Spare Parts Costs:	MGB	XU-1
Exhaust system	\$60.23	\$44.85
Clutch assembly	\$73.00	\$37.80
Headlight	\$3.89	\$5.75
Disc pads	\$12.05	\$13.72
Tail light assembly	\$21.32	\$12.45
Front mudguard	\$78.73	\$39.10
Windscreen	\$96.15	\$29.75
	(laminated)	(not laminated)
Battery	\$22.00	\$29.37
Warranty	12/12	12/12

ive handling and comfortable long-distance cruising the MGB could fill the bill very nicely.

We had expected the English car to be slaughtered by the Torana. Instead it acquitted itself very well indeed and in terms of handling provided more enjoyment than the XU-1. Too many people have dismissed it too easily — but that's Leyland's fault because it has delayed too long in giving the car the power it deserves and needs.

In fact, probably the most pertinent point to come out of our comparison is the fact that the B could

readily handle tons more power. Even though it's 10 years old, lack of guts, poor minor controls and perhaps an overly harsh ride are the only things wrong with its make-up.

Put in the Rover V8 engine, which we believe the car (or its much-facelifted replacement) is getting soon and you'd have a very nice machine indeed — one that should have the acceleration to match the new performance leaders like the XU-1 which really does offer the exciting motoring the way a soft-top used to for a similar sort of price. *

MERCEDES 350 SL Continued from page 26

Left to its own devices it behaves fairly normally and some of the changes are exceptionally smooth while others can be a bit jolty if you've done the wrong thing with the throttle. You can do it even more wrongly if you use the over-ride control and this is where the difference comes in.

The ordinary automatic box we are used to is designed to provide as near as you can get to one-gear motoring and the over-ride is an afterthought which grew from the need for a held change-down on steep down-gradients to provide engine braking. Second-hold came later and still isn't universal.

Using manual change on such a box you ease off to change down and press the pedal a trifle to change up, to keep everything smooth, because lower load (downchange) needs less gas and more load (upchange) calls for more. The torque converter takes care of the revs.

But Mercedes didn't see it that way at all. It designed a box which was as near as possible to a manual four-speed but with no need for a manual clutch. Thus when you select a lower gear you are expected to press the accelerator to keep the revs up, and release it for an upward change to ease them off, just as with a manual box. Get this into your noodle and you will drive a Mercedes as though you'd been born with a silver star in your mouth.

Some people have developed a habit with three-speed automatics of snicking down to provide engine braking when entering a corner but, with the Merc, you make the change-down rather earlier and then use the lower gear to accelerate through and

away. The lever is well shaped and nicely placed.

Having said all that, it is worth noting that the 4.5-litre version sold in America (bigger capacity but same power output) has a three-speed plus converter box to cope with that engine's greater torque (279 against 211, at 3200 revs against 4000).

The instruments and controls are all well placed but the steering wheel is an enormous thing, more like a dartboard than a means of controlling a car, but it is all a tribute to the great god of safety, because it carries a vast amount of padding, plus a collapsible boss, plus a collapsible column, plus a crushable front end, plus an engine that slides under the floor. The only puzzlement is how to have an accident with the car in the first place because there can be few safer.

A vast amount of thinking and wind tunnel work has gone into the exterior and it is shaped so that rain stays off the side windows and it keeps itself remarkably clean at all times.

The rubber buffers all the way round may not help it to win the Miss Pacific Quest but they are eminently practical and there is so much protection against stone damage to the finish that the thickness of the many layers of paint, primer, anti-rust and so on must account for a significant proportion of the weight.

It isn't a cheap car nor does it have much character, but if you spend a few hours going over the details, you will quickly realise that it cannot be at all cheap to make and, even at the Australian price, inflated as it is by transport costs, import duty, sales tax, and mark-up, the buyer is getting something of value which will remain in near-original condition for at least a decade.

And by that time, the pagoda roof may have come back into fashion. *



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