

Hit the road Jack . . . the two fastbacks on test. We found identical top end performance.



THE CLAUSTROPHOBIA GAME

. . . or how to shut out a beautiful freedom, with a more habitable and practical amendment to deepen the character of a basic sports car.

Special Comparison By SPORTS CAR WORLD Staff

The current trend of converting drop-tops into snug quasi-coupes may be regarded variously by the classicists and diehards as unethical, vulgar or style-cramping, but the movement is gaining force. Here are two more arguments in support of the Progressive Party for Sports Car Evolution. To rub salt into the wounds of the traditionalists we even found the modifieds to be far superior to their unrestricted source of origin.

THE Australian sports car market is currently overburdened with under-developed drop-tops posing as sports cars, GTs, fastbacks, 2 plus 2s or you-name-it. Few of them fill the bill of their titles and the really good cars are often missed by prospective buyers amid the mass of also-rans.

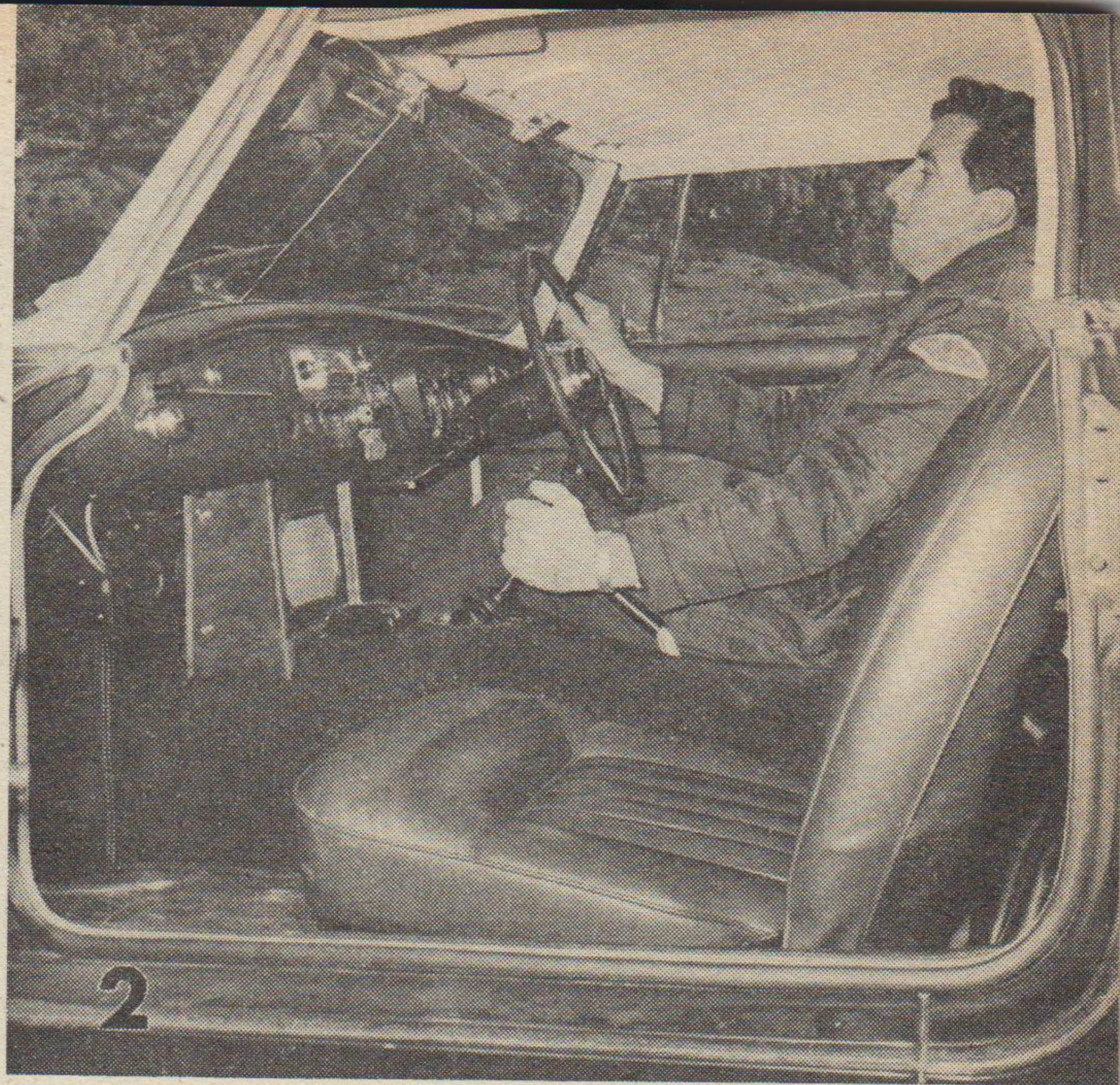
The MGB has outlived or outworn any association with the mediocre. From the top of the sales charts and the popularity poll it looks down with a sort of superior smugness on the host of pre-

tenders to the title of world's most popular sports car. In Australia it has ruled supreme since introduction.

Its failings have been noted however—American journals are among its greatest critics — and it is unfortunate that there must be criticisms at all for these are merely based on examples of poor construction execution rather than engineering problems. No-one has ever doubted the basic soundness of the MGB design. The factory has worked hard at producing a car which will be acceptable to many in appearance and concept and yet retains safety, performance and reasonable comfort in smallish overall price. That they have succeeded can again be illustrated by a quick reference to the sales charts.

But the MGB is at best basic sporting transport — and it doesn't pretend otherwise. Undoubtedly the most impressive Bs we have driven have been suitably converted cars which prefer to run under the title of quasi-coupe, rather than sports car. A variety of them have been fitted with full fastbacks, hardtops or other special conversions. Most of them have had special sound-deadening materials, odd interior adjustments and a great deal of extras fitted.

Now we have to add two more Gees to our list



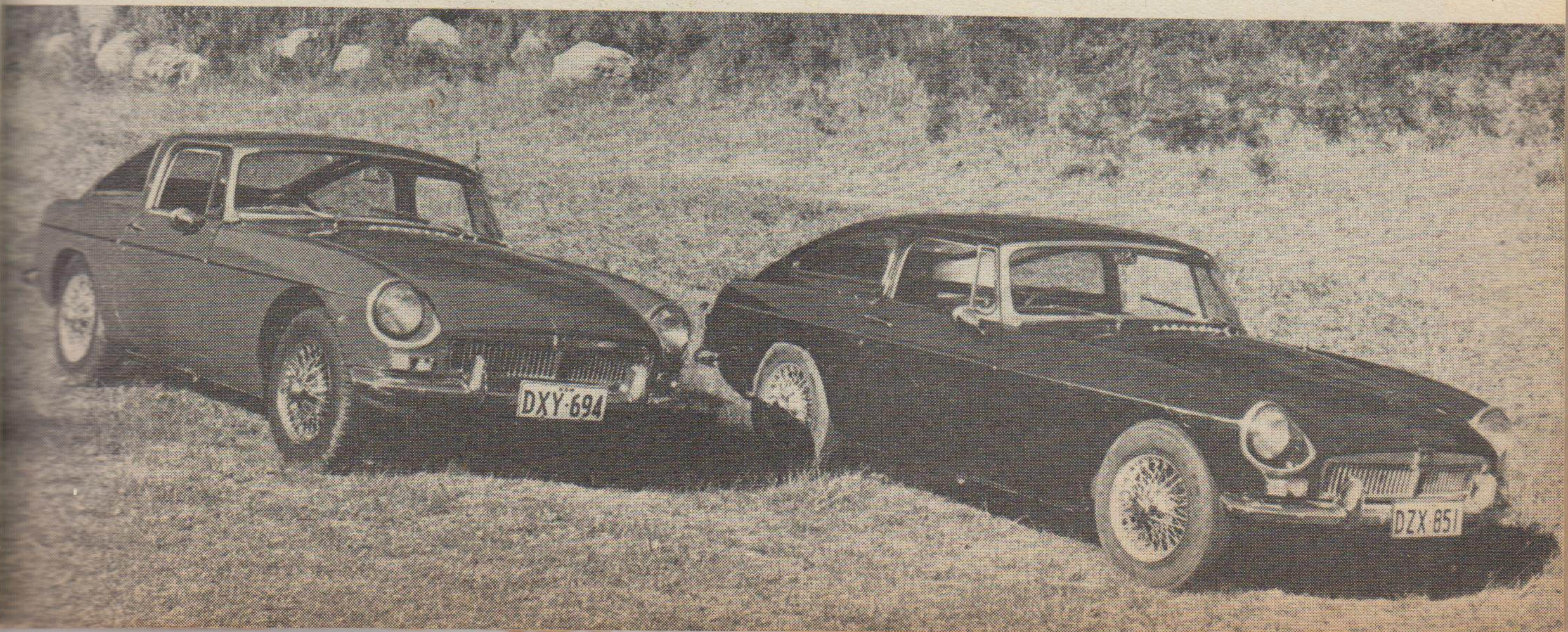
Pick the difference. Pic 1 (J and S) shows conventional driving position, minimal head room with seat chocks still fitted. Pic 2 shows better seat rake, better head clearance, of GS top but driver has to look over wheel. Pic 3 is standard MGB with most headroom of all, standard driving position. All have fair comfort.

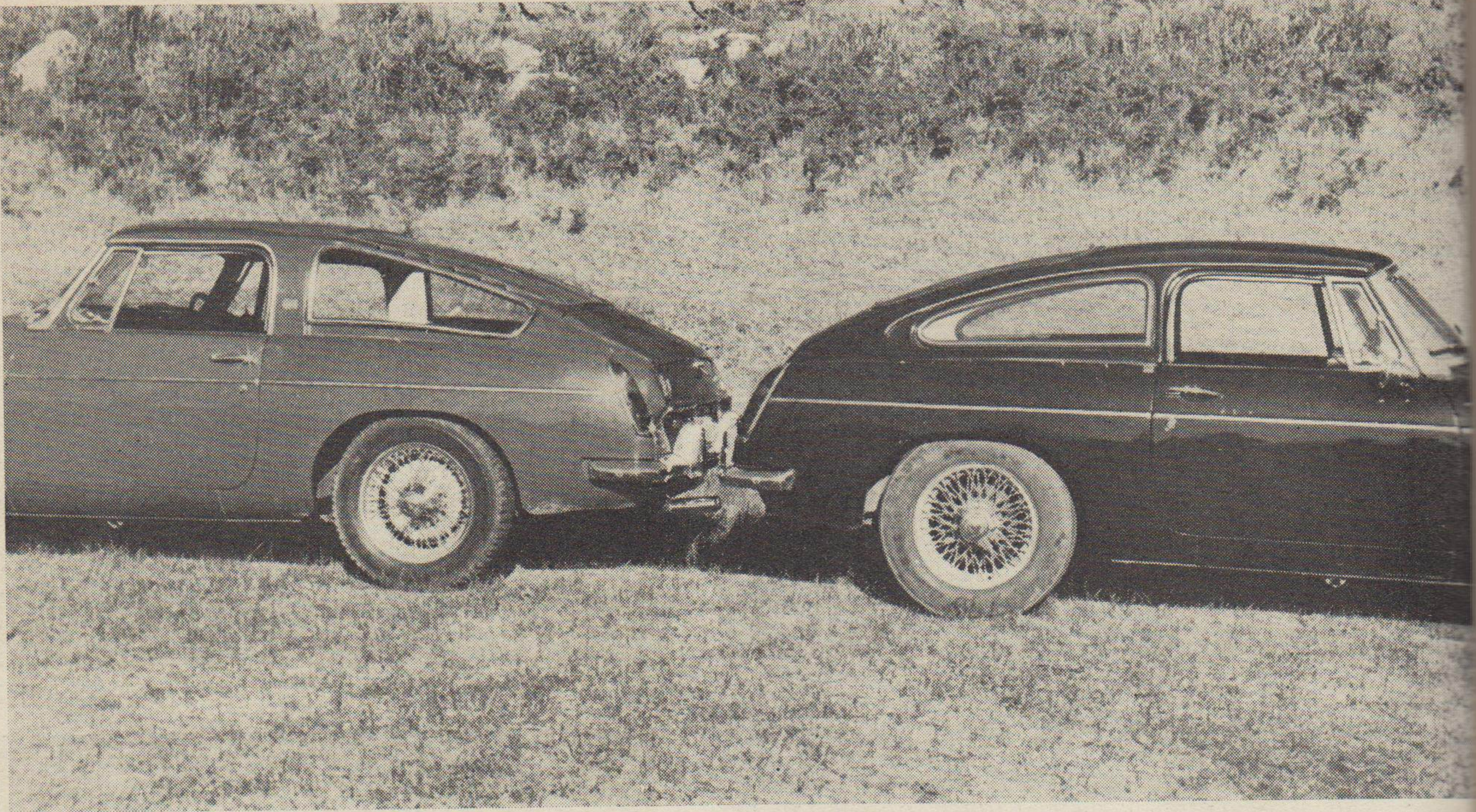
of favorites: Both are fastback hardtops, both are brand new and both make the MGB an eminently more habitable sports car.

The first example came from Gordon Stewart—Sydney's sports car centre now booming under the watchful eye of manager Barry Chenoweth. Chenoweth is noted among other things for the cleanest workshops in Sydney and a super van cum cruiser—completely fitted out with luxurious buckets, touring cockpit reminiscent of a trans-Canada scenic clipper and Freeway engine taken to MGB (that word again) specifications — all yielding a fantastic 90 mph performance on wide rims, Panhard rods and so on. But back to the hardtop. The new hardtop figures prominently in the Gordon Stewart advanced market policies with sports cars, . . . and thereby hangs a tail.

The Gordon Stewart top, as you have no doubt

J and S car (nearest) was more angular from frontal aspect. Both cars were beautifully presented. Plexiglass light fairings added neat touch.





View from the kerb: car-watchers first saw this handsome aspect of two cars in passing. Rooflines are quite different in profile.

noticed, bears more than a little resemblance to the old Peter Manton fastback top — the original fastback MGB in Australia. Actually this is no accident. The GS top is basically patterned on the original mould, with some up-to-date modifications to eliminate the earlier minor faults experienced with this top. Its history is inevitably tied up with the new J and S creation — although this design is totally different in concept and execution.

The connection lies in the design origin — or more specifically the man responsible for the design origin, one Anthony Pusterla. Pusterla, as explained in *SPORTS CAR WORLD* last month was working for International Styling in Melbourne when he conjured up the Manton top. This top was marketed through Peter Manton Motors, together with a host of performance goodies that accentuated the car's top end performance, and a liberal scattering of comfort details as a whole unit at \$3598.

The GS top emerged as a direct derivative of this original. The fibreglass was extended right down to the bumper bar where the securing points between top and body were located, and the tailgate eliminated. The side windows were extended and in place of the short-cropped original fibreglass moulding, a scalloped line was moulded into the shape at about the level of the point where the old top finished. The side glasses were extended further back and the centre glass panel abbreviated slightly. All the work was done by International Styling. Gordon Stewart is merely the NSW distributor (sole) of the hardtop. Peter Manton accepts the tops for the sole Victorian distribution.

Tony Pusterla left International Styling (he formed the company) and more by chance than design joined J and S in Sydney as the styling chief. Immediately he began work on his main ambition — the extension of the original Manton theme to its logical conclusion.

The result was the stunningly new and different J and S fastback, completed ironically at almost the same time as the Gordon Stewart top

was released.

The two tops were fitted to standard five bearing MGBs and both presented to us for an exclusive two-car road test. However there were differences. The GS car was stock standard off the showroom floor apart from running-in miles. It was fitted with a pushbutton radio, wood-rimmed steering wheel and disappearing aerial. The blocks on which the seat runners are mounted were removed and the seat bolted directly to the floor, with the front end of the runners slightly uphill. This gave the backrest greater rake as well as increasing the distance between the driver's head and the roof. This arrangement proved the most satisfactory for our long-legged staff members and we would recommend it for all tall drivers. The car was equipped with B7 Dunlops which even their makers admit are inadequate for the top speed potential of the car.

The hardtop itself was finished in deep BMC



like — to match the car — and combined quite handsomely. Inside it was very well lined and fitted with interior light (from Mini) and sun visors which could only be used in the forward position though fully effective. The GS top has no rear deck opening so access to the boot has been made by cutting away the centre of the separation panel between boot and cockpit. The edges were carefully left to ensure that torsional rigidity was not lost.

There has been considerable discussion on the subject of torsional rigidity losses. Some Melbourne owners reported body flexing on the original car although the panel was not cut out and many who have seen this top have expressed similar worries. BMC insists that the cut-out of the panel will not cause any body flexing as the panel was never intended to be a stress panel. The cross brace — the exterior body panel which normally carries the hood mounts—is retained and in the GS top was covered with black vinyl to match the carpeting.

All the rear compartments were fully carpeted. Accessibility to the far end of the hardtop is extremely difficult and small items like cigarette packets could make for a lot of stretching once they worked themselves right down to the back. In addition the spare wheel with its vinyl cover is located in the boot and therefore has to be dragged through the passenger compartment to be removed. GS say no boot lid was added because of losses in rigidity of the hardtop itself and leakage problems. Frankly we can't see why the latter should enter the picture any more than on a production car (there was no problem on the J and S top) and if the top is properly moulded around the opening there should be no significant loss in glass strength.

There were a few rough patches in the fibreglass mould and the interior trim, but the top was wholly produced in Melbourne and was the prototype. Subsequent tops will be subjected to rigid quality control for the glasswork.

The wind-up window glasses did not seem to meet particularly well but the car proved completely waterproof even under the full force of power water jets.

The J and S car and top were slightly different again. Ron Phillips laid on a car from his thriving Sydney sports car business and J and S fitted it

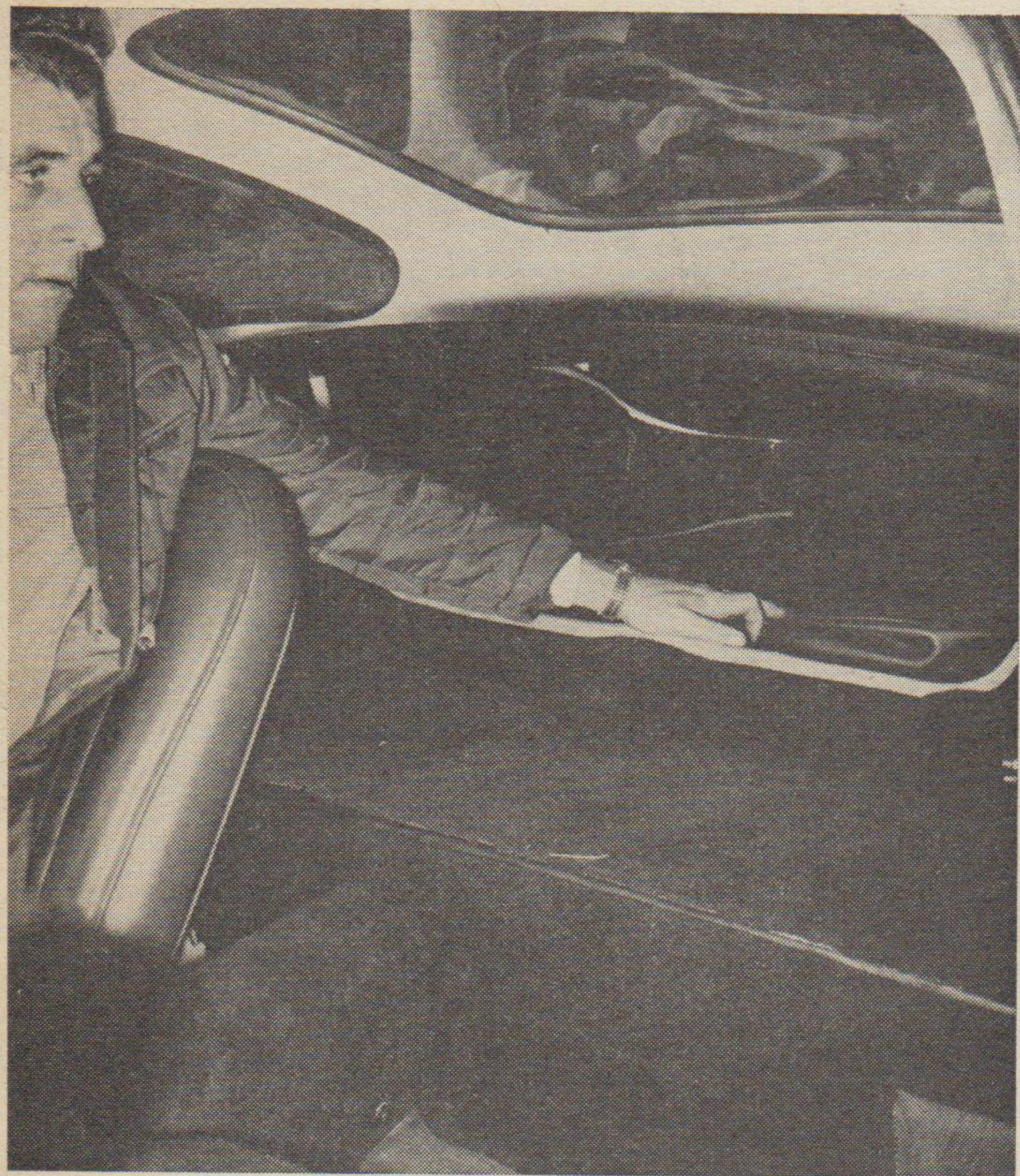
Threeway look. Specifications are unchanged from standard car (centre) although looks are wildly different. Both tops attracted attention.



The baby E-type bit: GS top has tail reminiscent of X-K-E, J and S (right) with bigger glass is more like Bertone Alfa effort.







An inside look. Access to all compartments in GS car is through passenger's cockpit (seat is hinged). J and S has boot deck lid fitted — higher lip, deeper reach, slightly less space.

up with their own top — all in BMC red. Tony Pusterla fitted up the chromed and Pirelli-shod wheels from his own car to ensure the car had the best road equipment. Unlike the Gordon Stewart car the seats were not lowered and the resultant restriction in head room was noticeable. The car was also fully equipped with complete safety harness for both seats, which made it unlikely for the driver to be able to reach the roof with his head anyway.

For a couple of trial runs we left the belts undone, but the clearance proved no problem, although the seating position was not nearly as comfortable without the increased rake. However shorter drivers found it more suitable. As the pictures show the J and S top has the boot compartment opened with a key — the catch comes straight from the MGB boot lid.

The vents on the glass separation pillars are actually extractor vents. Inside clue of their existence can be found six inches behind normal head position where a throat is let in on each side of the head lining. Future J and S plans include either a small grille for the vents or perforated pvc lining covering them completely through which the vents would draw.

The extractor system is cunningly designed to prevent entry of water with a special drain trough (invisible) which sucks all the water out of the bottom. Unfortunately, because the prototype top we had fitted had not been completed in this area the venting system did not always work properly. At all speeds with the quarter vents or front centre vent open the extractors worked perfectly, but with everything closed they would not extract cigarette smoke and even introduced exhaust fumes from the turbulence around the rear end. J and S have assured us this is purely a feature of the unfinished tops and future tops will not suffer the problems. Unlike the GS top the boot-passenger compartment separation panel is retained because of access to the boot by the rear deck lid. This hinges upward on the standard MGB boot hinges and gives reasonable access. The lid will have a prop-stay for future production models.

The back of the hardtop carries the MGB emblem plus the small script *Styled by Anthony Pusterla*. The side panels are decorated with tiny J and S emblems superimposed on a map of Australia, with a GTB motto below. Inside an interior light was fitted (behind the headline — not above the windscreen as on the GS top) but no sunvisors were fitted. Future plans include swinging version of these, to be offered as an option. Once again the interior is carpeted, and the whole thing was waterproof.

There are many similarities between the tops. Both use tinted plexiglas all around (J and S had a green tint — GS a blue tint). Both give some refraction of light at night — the GS top being slightly worse because of the near-to-horizontal glass. However, rearward vision in the mirror is not particularly restricted in either although both had supplementary exterior racing mirrors which we would suggest are a must. All glass was trimmed with chromed ribbon strips set in black rubber surrounds.

The J and S side glasses wrap around into the top roof line while the GS glass is moulded clearly in two separate sections — horizontal and vertical planes separated by the gutter. This extends almost full length on the GS top, ending about level with the taillight cluster. It is merely a ridge in the fibreglass to deflect water away from the windows. There is no groove and wind pressure alone is left to channel the water down the sloping back. It is trimmed with a flat chrome strip. The J and S top uses a different process — grooved aluminium ribbing is pop riveted to the inside of the fibreglass and provides a distinct

gutter surround for both the windup windows. There is no continuation of gutter down the rear section.

Both hardtops are secured at the windscreen, the side at the hood bow mountings, and at the rear. Neither top uses a relocated petrol filler cap and both are very hard to get at for fills. The GS top was particularly securely mounted at the rear on either side, while the J and S top was held only in the centre, although all production units will be mounted at the sides. The GS top was absolutely rigid at all times as was the J and S — although under brutal sideways g forces there was a hint of localised vibration from the rear corners of the J and S top indicating the wide-spaced mounting pivots will be a necessity. Both tops had to be moulded with more-than-necessary tolerance where the glass joins the rear boot panel because of variation in MGB bodies. One J and S top we saw fitted exactly — another left a gap which was nevertheless completely draught and water proof. Neither top suffers boom or interior resonance and both seem extremely rigid.

Both makers claim increases in fuel economy and top speed, so we took the cars out to compare. Gordon Stewart also managed to provide a standard MGB for comparison where BMC and all other Sydney BMC dealers failed.

Because it was a three bearing we only used it for photographic purposes and later borrowed a P and R Williams car to obtain figures.

We decided against fuel flow figures because one car was running a little rich and the other lean, there were different exhaust systems fitted and the cars proved to have such identical top end performance that differential in fuel economy between equal cars seemed unlikely.

The cars recorded an identical top speed of 107.1 mph after two runs in each direction. The average worked out at 103 mph. We tried their performance over a quarter mile and the J and S car ran slightly ahead, although it was caught in the upper speed reaches by the GS car. Both cars also recorded near-identical top gear acceleration figures in the extreme high ranges — as shown on the chart. Speedometer error was interesting. The GS car was an average 4-5 mph out all the way up the scale, while the J and S car, because of the effect of low profile tyres on the gearing erred from 5 mph low in the range to 10 mph inaccuracy above 80 mph.

Both irregularities account in some way for the optimistic top speed ratings many MGB drivers claim to have seen on the speedometers. As we recorded on our previous test last year, the five bearing MGB records a maximum top speed of 102 mph, thus making the claims of both manufacturers for 5 mph top speed increase entirely justified and precisely accurate. Fuel economy figures, claimed for an increase of 3-5 mpg could not be expected except high up in the cruising range. The car might save you \$1-\$2 between Sydney and Melbourne at a good average, but we don't think there is any gain in store for suburban driving.

However, we place very little importance at all on maximum speed figures. Australian roads do not permit sustained maximum speed cruising and few people ever venture to the limit for prolonged periods, anyway. What is important about the tops is the increased comfort they give and the change of character that takes place.

They immediately turn the car into fairly snug and at least weatherproof quasi-coupes. Wind noise up high is minimised, although engine sounds can become quite accentuated. Most people who buy such a top would be well advised to fit an interior silencing kit to deaden mechanical noise and the cockpit would then be an immensely habitable place for grand touring. Loud exhaust

systems can bring a dramatic increase in noise and are inadvisable.

Australians are very lucky to have two such superior units readily available at once. Both are very attractive (the J and S top attracted most attention) and both are well finished products offering good value-for-money. There are those few extra mph if you do want to run out a standard car to its limits on the open road and for sure you can do it far more quietly and comfortably. Some of the little tricks like seat lowering and fitting of sun visors could be applied to almost any MGB whether fitted with hardtop or not, and their value is really appreciated when the car assumes its new form. The J and S top offers an exceptionally light and airy solution to the problem — the GS a very snug and enclosing solution. The GS top costs \$490 (fitted), the J and S top (without sun visors) \$20 less. Yours is the choice. #

DETAILS OF THE MGB SPECIFICATIONS

CHASSIS AND BODY DIMENSIONS:

Wheelbase	7 ft 7 in.
Track, front	4 ft 1 in.
Track, rear	4 ft 1 1/4 in.
Ground clearance	5 in.

GENERAL INFORMATION:

Steering type	rack and pinion
Brake type	Lockheed disc front, drum rear
Swept area	310 sq in.
Fuel tank capacity	10 gallons
Cruising range	180-230 miles
Fuel requirement	95 octane
Oil system capacity	8.5 pints

SUSPENSION:

Front	coils, wishbones
Rear	semi-elliptic leaf
Shock absorbers	hydraulic lever arm

ENGINE:

Cylinders	four, in line
Bore and stroke	80.00 mm by 81.5 mm
Cubic capacity	1798 cc
Compression ratio	8.8 to 1
Valve operation	pushrod, overhead
Piston speed at maximum rpm	3150 ft/min
Maximum power	95 bhp at 5400 rpm
Maximum torque	100 lb/ft at 3000 rpm
Power to weight ratio	86.3 bhp/ton

TRANSMISSION:

Overall ratios—	
First	14.21
Second (synchro)	8.66
Third (synchro)	5.37
Fourth (synchro)	3.91
Final drive	3.91 to 1

PERFORMANCE

STANDARD CAR

Top Speed Average	100.4 mph
Fastest Run	101.6 mph
Standing quarter mile average	18.7 secs
60-80 mph	10.0 secs
80-100 mph	NA

GORDON STEWART

Top Speed Average	105.3 mph
Fastest Run	107.1 mph
Standing quarter mile average	19.3 secs
60-80 mph	9.3 secs
80-100 mph	20.1 secs

J & S CAR

Top Speed Average	105.3 mph
Fastest Run	107.1 mph
Standing quarter mile average	18.9 secs
60-80 mph	9.8 secs
80-100 mph	20.3 secs