

WE WRAP-UP MG 123

After just on 20,000 miles, we say goodbye to MG 123 — and look back on 12 months of fun and few problems . . .

WE SWITCHED OFF the ignition, undid the seat belt for the last time, ran our hands once more over the leather-bound Cosmic steering wheel and then walked away from MG 123 feeling just a little sad.

It seemed only a day since we had first driven the Camino Gold car out of the British Leyland gates in Sydney . . . not 12 months and 20,000 miles later. But our extended test had come to an end and the time had arrived to hand the car back to BL.

MG 123 had come through the tough test with flying colors. The original aim was to develop the car, with as little cost as possible, so that it would be a good road-goer and a competitive clubman car . . . which we did.

SCW staff had a lot of fun in the machine and some traumatic experiences . . . like the time we were caught in a flash flood and the car almost joined the

Navy. We had exhilarating interstate trips with the top down and we had sat and cursed Sydney's choking peak hour traffic.

Then there was the time we lost our QI Cibie lights when the wires wouldn't take the extra current . . . and caught fire about 20 miles south of Taree in the middle of nowhere. And then there was the time the spare head was lost in transit from the spare parts factory to Lynx engineering, who were waiting to modify it, so we could compete in the Australian Hill Climb Championships.

The head arrived at Lynx the day before we were due to leave for Queensland. Lynx turned their head room upside down to get the job done and opened their factory at 6.30 the next morning to fit it and dyno tune the car. We were on the road by lunch time. Although MG 123 had no hope of winning

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Six chromed nuts hold the removeable section in place. The top is fully lined and well finished. Rubber beading around the edges stops any water leaks.





The J and S sunroof top is fitted to the car in a similar fashion to the standard hard-tops. When the top is removed it stows easily in the boot.

After the nuts are undone the top section of the roof lifts straight off. It can be replaced in minutes in a rain squall.



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against some very hot machinery, including a full-house factory Lotus Elan, its performance raised more than one eyebrow.

Except for a broken throttle cable — on Sydney's Harbor Bridge, of course — the car didn't give us a moment's trouble. It ran sweetly for the 20,000 miles . . . and they were hard miles, from the heat of Queensland to the cold of the snow country. We even finished the test with the same set of Olympic GT tyres still showing another two or three thousand miles of life. The only other item that needed replacing was the muffler, which rusted out.

With the SU carburetors we found the head operated efficiently only above 4000 rpm and was a little fluffy down low. To combat this we fitted a 45 DCOE Weber. Lynx did the conversion using their own manifold. It was a simple bolt-on, bolt-off job and looked neater than the SU set-up.

The Weber carby was jetted with 36 mm chokes, 5 mm secondaries, 180 air, 165 mains, 50F8 idle, 55 pump, 45 bypass and F16 emulsion tubes. With the SUs the engine had 77 horsepower units in third gear at 5600 rpm on the Lynx dyno. But with the Weber this jumped to 93 horsepower units at 5800 rpm in third.

There was not a startling increase in performance, but the engine felt more torquey and tractable down low. Even some dyed-in-the-wool enthusiasts admitted MG 123 was the best B they had ever driven. This gave us a lot of satisfaction because this was what we had set out to do at the cheapest possible price.

Being enthusiasts, we were a little hesitant, at first, to fit the car with a hardtop. We tested two of the J and S tops manufactured in Sydney and soon saw the

value of a hard top, especially on winter days and, of course, trips to the snow country. Besides the soft-top leaked in the wet. On sunny days we left the hard-top at home and stowed the soft one in the boot in case of rain.

But on a trip back from the Hardie-Ferodo 500 at Bathurst we cursed the hard-top. The sun came out and we sweltered, wishing we could take it off and leave it somewhere. We mentioned this to J and S — and they already had a solution. With the current craze of sunroofs appearing in sedans, Geoff Simmons had the idea of creating a hard-top with a sunroof in it. This would serve two purposes . . . a full hardtop for wet or cold weather and a sunroof for sunny weather. This would be extremely handy on long interstate trips.

The top is similar to the standard J and S hard top, but a special section in the top is removeable. This stows in the boot when not in use. Held by six chromed nuts it is fixed in place in seconds — certainly far quicker than trying to struggle with the soft-top in a rain squall.

The top we tested was the prototype and except for a couple of minor problems with the nuts it worked efficiently. It certainly brought some interested looks from other MG owners.

The top had a vinyl finish effect which was moulded into the fibreglass and was easy to keep clean. Special drainage run-offs were cast into the top and even in heavy downpours no water leaked into the cockpit. The J and S hard-top with sunroof is now available for around \$212 — and is well worth looking at.

The only problem with a hard-top is that inevitable chaffing or marking around the back of the cockpit. One reader sent in an idea he thought might be helpful. He has glued some foam rubber around the bottom of his top and says this works well. At least his paintwork is unmarked.

MGs have their knockers but the fact remains they are still the most popular sports car on the road today and British Leyland are selling as many as they can assemble at their Sydney plant. Despite this it's time the MG marque had a change. We saw a styling uplift during the middle of last year. But in 1971 the MG enthusiast could have a brand new model to play with. Would you believe an Australian designed version with the six cylinder engine from the Kimberly mounted north-south? *

STORMIN' NORMAN

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"I just hung on to ride it out," Norm says. "It clobbered the fence and did about 600 quids worth of damage. But it didn't feel all that desperate."

It certainly looked it. The car thundered around the uphill sweeper to Craven A completely sideways, a water haze spinning up off the rear rubber. There was no way it was going to miss the fence. It got two wheels over the Armco and flattened three complete palings before dropping back to the track and skidding into the opposite bank.

The only thing louder than its exhaust on the day was the explosion of that impact.

Plagued with development problems, Norm sold the car privately and progressed to a Ford Galaxy owned by his old adversary Len Lukey. But it was only a stop gap. In 1964 he was instrumental in forming the Neptune Trident racing team, the first really big-time professional barnstorming motor racing amalgamation to get underway in the country. Beechey was to drive a Holden S4, Jim McKeown a Lotus Cortina and Peter Manton a Mini.

The EH S4 was probably the most crowd-pleasing car Norm has ever driven. His reception at Creek Corner was unbelievable: "You might say we've got the ability to slow up a race meeting," he smiles. "If

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