

# BMC (Australia)



‘Context is everything!’ – a much-used phrase but a most important one. If one is aware of the context, it is much easier to understand the actions of people and corporations and the reasoning behind many of their decisions. I believe this is the case when looking at the MGB. Many of the questions such as ‘What were they thinking?’; ‘why did they do it that way?’ can be answered if we understand the environment and thinking at the time these vehicles were made. They also give one a much better perspective about what the car is, what it was expected to achieve, and what it meant to the buying public at the time.

The MGB was a product of post WW II industrial Britain. After nearly a decade of devoting people and physical resources to the ‘war effort’, the British (and much of the western world) were thrust into a rebuilding phase. The whole industrial effort was now able to pick up where it had left off almost ten years ago and concentrate on making both the country, and therefore its people,



prosperous again. Such a massive rebuilding program was costly. Countries were looking for the quickest way to take the now outdated technology and to continue producing goods and services as quickly and efficiently as possible.

The USA, not having been involved to the extent of Britain initially (the country was not attacked to the extent that Britain was), had the advantage of progressing with their car development during this period. Where the USA had embraced the ever-developing technology of mass production, Britain was forced (due to reasons previously mentioned) to produce vehicles, using much outdated technology, but still needing to compete in a world market. Whilst in most cases this was done to a high standard, nevertheless they were coming from the 'back of the pack', consequently striving for similar quality and quantity, but with diminishing returns. Having said all that, there was still a desire for the British product, based on a mixture of style, quality and perhaps nostalgia.

*NB: It is said that much of the marque's popularity in the USA was due to ex-servicemen, stationed in Britain during the war, wanting the cars they had been exposed to during this time.*

Australia, who had partnered Great Britain throughout the war, was in a similar situation and needing to provide, not only for returning service men and women, but to meet an aggressive campaign by the governments of the day to expand the industrial base of Australia, through a concerted effort to attract migrants from around the world to share in its promised wealth. A much-touted phrase by the Australian government was 'produce or perish'.

## **The BMC story**

Most people, here and overseas, were (and remain) quite unaware of just how large a venture BMC (Australia) was. The factory, on a 57-acre site, was equipped with its own foundry facilities, panel pressing facilities, trim and paint shops and research laboratories. It possessed the largest presses at the time in the Southern hemisphere. Many of the engines, transmissions, axles and vehicle body panels were all cast, pressed and assembled locally. At one stage, BMC was producing a car every 4 minutes.

*NB: Despite BMC Australia's significant local facilities, in the case of Australian assembled MG cars, most of the mechanical components and body panels were imported from the UK.*





Figure 1 Aerial view of site (photo: J. Lindsay)



Figure 2 Feeder Companies onsite (photo: BMLHG)







Figure 3 Feeder Companies onsite (photo: BMLHG)



Figure 4 Some of the Presses (photo: J Lindsay)



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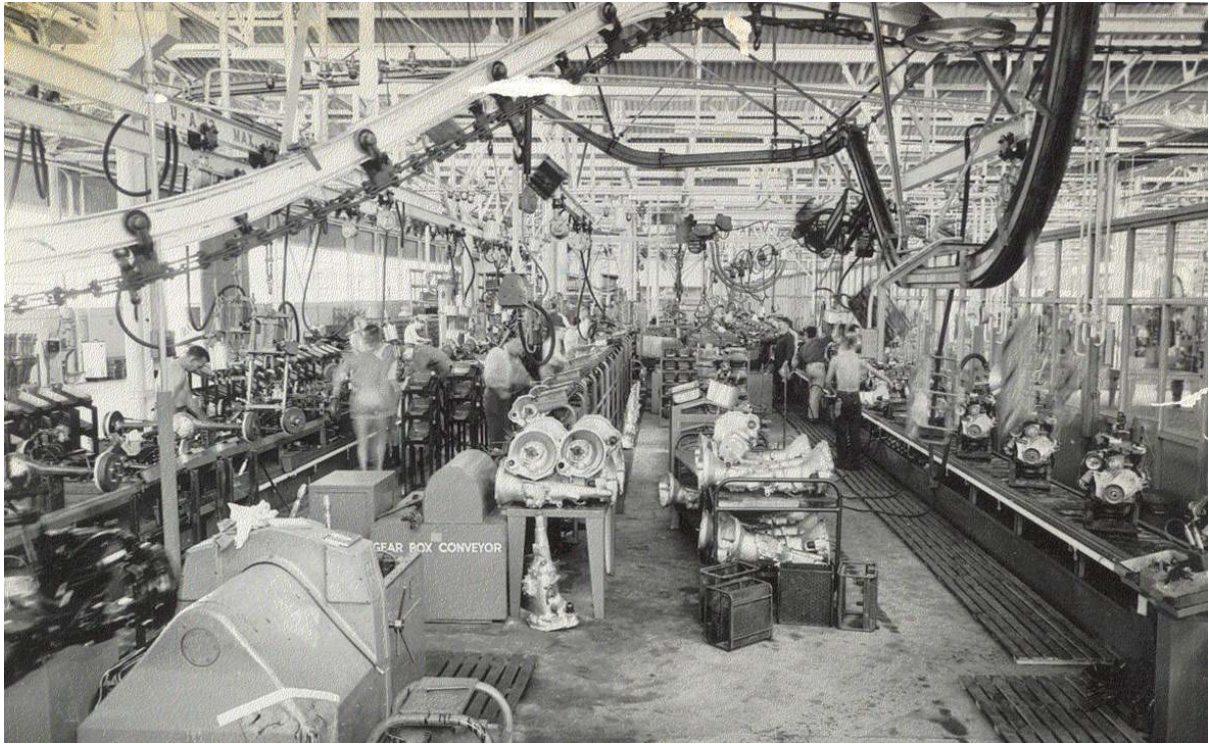


Figure 5 Unit Plant (photo: BMCLHG)



Figure 6 Drawing Office - Planning (photo: J. Lindsay)



Figure 7 Experimental (photo: BMCLHG)







Figure 8 Laboratory (photo: J. Lindsay)

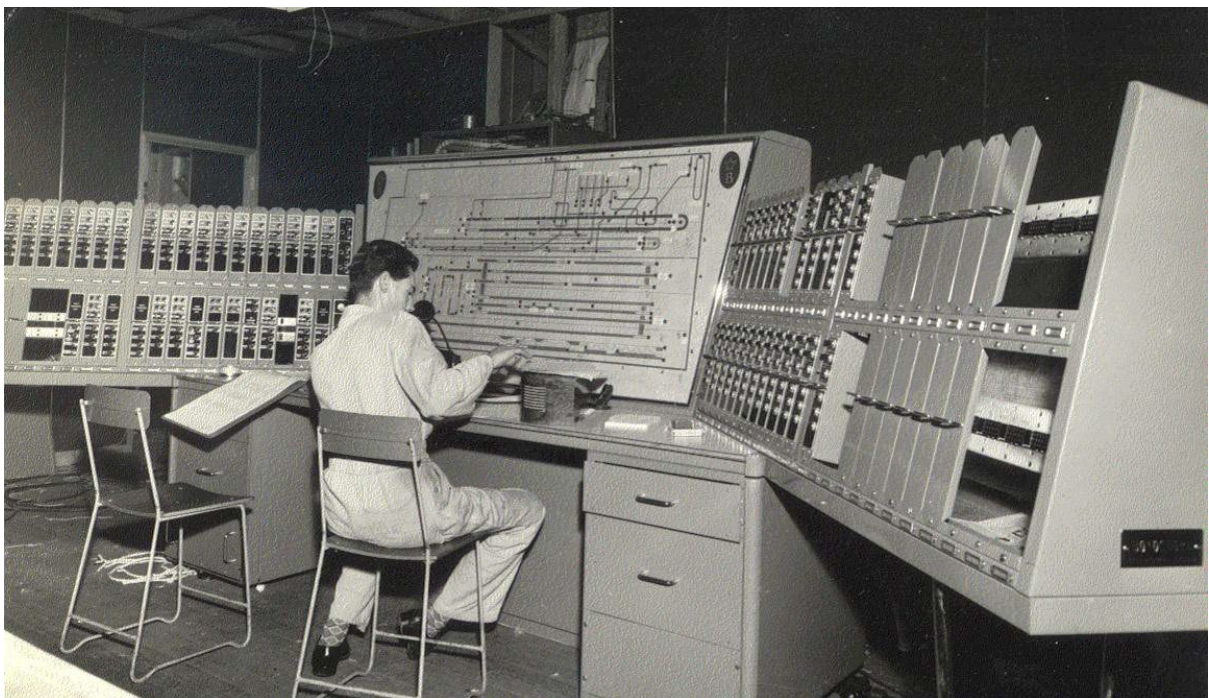


Figure 9 Conveyor Control Room (photo: J Lindsay)





Figure 10 Apprentices (photo: BMCLHG)







Figure 11 Apprentice marching practice (photo: BMCLHG)



Figure 12 BMC Youth Orchestra (photo: BMCLHG)



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### Acknowledgement:

The following is a summary of a PowerPoint presentation, given at the AEI in 2002 by the BMC/L Heritage Group. A copy of the presentation is attached below, with accompanying notes. The majority of the information is taken directly from this source (plus BUILDING CARS IN AUSTRALIA: BMC-LEYLAND AUSTRALIA HERITAGE GROUP, 2012). For a more informative appreciation, I would strongly recommend you take time to look at these source documents as they are most informative and carry many great photos of the whole operation.

This piece has been included with the view to contextualise the production of the MGB in what could only be described as a major business providing a large contribution to the post-WWII development of NSW. *Roger Sharpe 2025*

## PEOPLE

## PLACE

## PLANT

## PROCESS

### PEOPLE:

A company's success is largely dependent on the employees. They play an enormous role in shaping a company's culture and possibility of success. Very few companies faced this dependency more than the Australian BMC/L organization.

From 1950 – 1975, it employed 5 000 to 7 000 employees at any one time. These were mainly migrants arriving in Australia post WWII. Most could not speak English and in fact, sign language was quite often used. There were 35 different languages spoken. Multi-lingual leading-hands were used to help this situation, with English classes held on-site to acclimatise to the work and cultural environment.

As was to be expected, there was a fairly high staff turnover rate, as this was 'first' place of employment for many migrants, whilst they established their roots in their newly adopted country. At this time, it was the largest employer in Sydney.

Its significance as a major contributor to Sydney's economic and social development should not be understated. It played a similar role as the Snowy Scheme.

### PLACE:

BMC operated out of two main sites in NSW; 1. **Enfield**, where Pressed Metal Corporation (PMC) assembled CKD (Completely Knocked Down) kits of a variety of vehicles (**The Mk I MGB was assembled here**). PMC worked as a subsidiary from 1955 – 1968, when they were purchased by BMC/L and 2. **Victoria Park** (aka Waterloo, aka Zetland) where the main operation was conducted.

The Victoria Park site was part of the Waterloo Swamp (connected to the Lachlan and Botany Swamp). The site was initially purchased as a site for a racecourse in 1907. In the 1930s it included a golf course; the army resumed the site in 1942, then back to a racecourse from 1945 till 1952.



Lord Nuffield (chairman of Nuffield Organisation, UK – mainly Morris vehicles) had visited Australia pre-WWII in order to organize the expansion of the Morris' operations after the war. Hearing that the Victoria Park site was for sale, Nuffield purchased it himself in 1948 and sold it to the Nuffield board in 1949.

Sydney City Council approved the site development in 1949 (115 acres). Half of the site was immediately sub-divided and sold to companies who would become their main suppliers (James N Kirby, Champion Spark Plug Co. Lucas, Olympic Tyres & Rubber Products Co, Joseph Lucas etc).

### **PLANT:**

The plant was an almost totally self-reliant operation with the inclusion of the satellite businesses on the same land. The Sydney architect, Francis Feledy had designed the buildings to be sequentially completed to enable production to flow at the earliest possible time.

Apart from the myriad of stores and amenities buildings, there were 3 main parts to the operation:

1. **Press or Body Shop** (pressing of body panels and the assembly of body shells)
2. **Unit or mechanical sub-assembly plant** (manufacture of engines, gearboxes, rear axles and suspension sub-assemblies)
3. **Car Assembly plant** (painting of body shells from the press shop and the assembly into those shells of the major units from the Unit plant and the remaining components)

There was a smaller factory (**CKD**) built in 1950 that facilitated the assembly of UK imported vehicles. This building was being used whilst the racecourse was still being used (as can be seen in many photos). It played a crucial role in the overall plan as it enabled cars to be assembled, and therefore sold, whilst simultaneously providing staff the opportunity to 'practice' the operation that was about to unfold. The plan was for an average cycle time of one vehicle every 4 minutes (effective production, based on a 2-shift basis of 50 000 vehicles per annum. This crucial part of the operation also enabled the reduced reliance on imported parts (a strong part of the Australian government's national plan).

The next building to be completed was the **Unit Factory** (plus **Parts store**) in 1956. Following this, came the **CAB**, whilst the **Press shop** was being simultaneously being prepared. Both of the buildings were completed by 1958. Some of the additional buildings were: Spare Parts warehouse, Personnel Office, Employee Amenities Building, Garage. The site was a self-sustainable location for the manufacture of motor vehicles.

*(NB: slides 21-28 of the attached PowerPoint presentation give views of much of the interiors).*

### **PROCESS:**

By any measure, the Victoria Park operation was advanced, incorporating methods that were ahead of their time. Some of these features were:

- No manual movement at any stage of production
- An extensive network of overhead conveyors, delivering components to the precise location needed in the assembly areas.





- Due to the 'no storage' feature of the operation, parts were delivered at the place, at the time they were needed. This practice is referred to nowadays as **JIT** (Just In Time) and is ubiquitous in today's manufacturing.
- The patented '**Rotodip**' system was used in the Paint shop. Here, vehicles were put through a system of treatments, requiring the car bodies to be completely immersed in baths (a 'skewer' ran through the length of the vehicle). This ensured that every nook and cranny was treated and coated, to minimise the risk of rust.
- The assembly line enabled the practice of 'flexible manufacture'. This meant that a variety of models and their variable requirements could be produced simultaneously in any sequence.

During this time, **The Parts and Accessories Building** had been operating since 1956. When activities within were transferred to Liverpool in 1968, the building was repurposed (becoming known as **CAB3**) to accommodate the assembly of **MGBs**, on a CKD basis. The **MGB Mk1** assembly that had been occurring at Enfield (under PMC), was closed and transferred to Victoria Park into the **CAB3** building. This was followed by the introduction of the new **MGB Mk11** model, necessitating new infrastructure and assembly routines. The bodies were assembled and welded here. They were then transferred to **CAB1** for Rotodip and paint, with **CAB1** supplying small parts painting, road wheel and tyre assembly, plus trim sub-assemblies. The bodies were then returned to **CAB3** for completion. This practice continued until near the end of 1972.

## Relationship with the Dealer Network

With any organization as large as this was, the relationship with the dealers was crucial. These people not only relied on BMC providing them with a saleable product, but critically, a communication network that kept the dealer fully informed. New products, product changes, servicing procedures, product issues were but a few of the issues that dealers expected to be informed about. In return, BMC welcomed and expected good and bad constructive feedback. This loop was carried out formally through monthly meetings with sales and service managers (Australia wide) as well as regular bulletins, covering all issues that could be of interest to dealers. A variety of these bulletins are included throughout this website. A light-hearted Xmas greeting letter (1964) was sent to all Service Managers. Take your pick as to which side of the document you read.





# Service bulletin

THE BRITISH MOTOR CORPORATION (AUSTRALIA) PTY. LIMITED

Christmas, 1964.

As Christmas fast approaches, we once again survey the past year's activities. Our Service Bulletin, in the same form that this message takes, is indicative of one of our several methods of circulating service information to you, the B. M. C. Dealer.

The endeavour and, indeed, the ambitions of the section of our department responsible for compiling this information, is to keep ahead of the problems that you are likely to encounter. This mammoth task entails constant liaison with all sections of our large organisation, in obtaining the necessary knowledge to enable you to give first class service to B. M. C. owners.

The effort put into this work can only be repaid by you, our Dealer, taking every opportunity to make full use of this information. We trust that such information is received and used with the same sincerity as that with which this bulletin is sent in wishing you, your staffs and families a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous New Year.

Our Factory will be closed down from the 21st December, 1964, to 14th January, 1965, but during this period, as in previous years, a limited staff will be on duty in the Service Department to handle urgent enquiries.

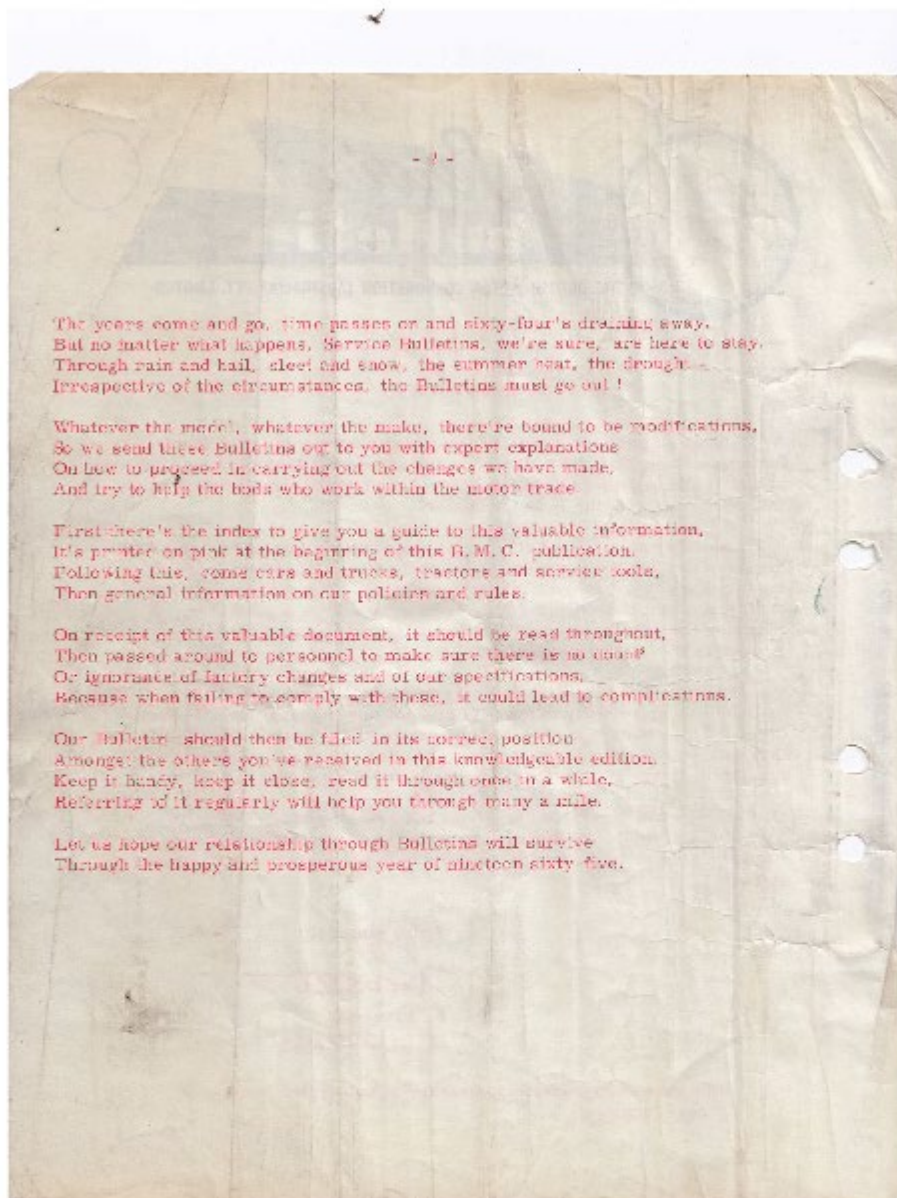
Yours sincerely,

N. Prescott,  
Service Manager.

P.S. For those who prefer our message in a different form - please turn over . . . . .







PowerPoint presentation given at the AEI in 2002 by the BMC/L Heritage Group

[25 Years of BMC-Leyland Aust MV Manufacturing at VP](#)

Notes to and forming part of the above PowerPoint presentation.

[Notes for 25 Years of BMC-Leyland Aust](#)



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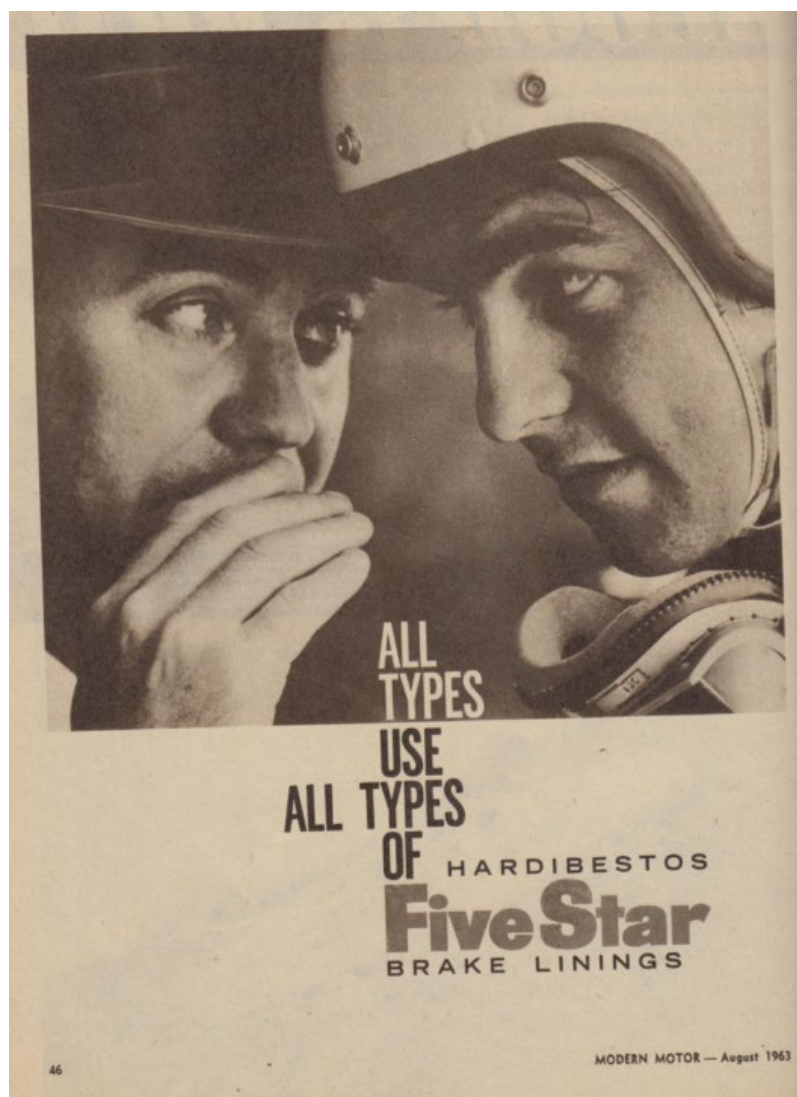
Thanks to John Lindsay, the following address to the Institution of Auto and Aero Engineers, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of April, 1958 gives a great appreciation of the complete operation at Zetland/Waterloo.

The article is in the form of 'lecture notes' but you don't have to read too much between the lines to gain a good appreciation of the magnitude of the BMC operation.

[BMC 1958 Address](#)

### Original Documents

[SLS Docs - BMC](#)



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