

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 Countries were looking for the quickest way to take the now outdated technology and to continue producing goods and services as quickly and efficiently as possible.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technology of mass production, Britain was forced (due to reasons previously mentioned) to produce vehicles, using much outdated technology, but still needing to compete in a world market.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 Company

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.

There were 'feeder' companies (eg Joseph Lucas, Smith's, James N Kirby, Champion Spark Plug Company and Olympic Tyre and Rubber Company) which took up the remaining land of the 115 acre site and established local factories to support BMC as well as other producers in Australia). As a result, a number of unique vehicles for the Australian market were constructed here. (The original



prototype MGC, incidentally, used an Australian 2.4 litre 6-cylinder engine based on '1.5' 1622cc 'B' series engines.)

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





Figure 2 Feeder Companies onsite (photo: BMLHG)





Figure 3 Some of the Presses (photo: J Lindsay)



Figure 4 Unit Plant (photo: BMCLHG)





Figure 5 Drawing Office - Planning (photo: J. Lindsay) Figure 6 Experimental (photo: BMCLHG)



Figure 7 Laboratory (photo: J. Lindsay)



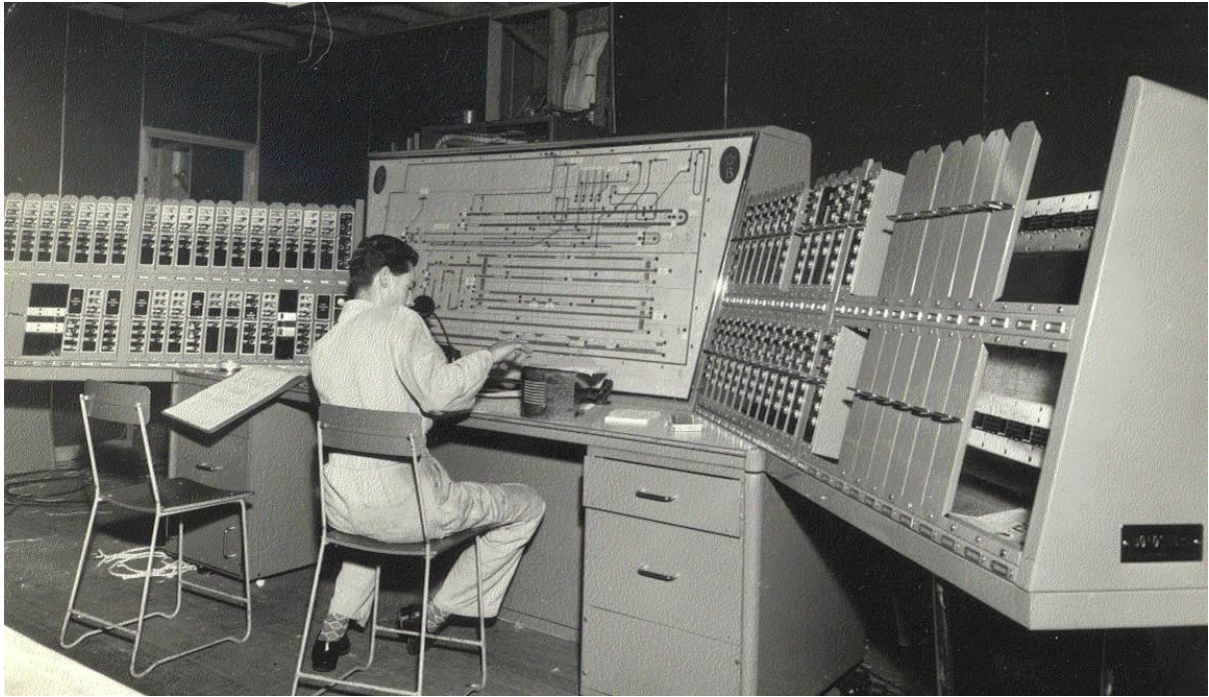


Figure 8 Conveyor Control Room (photo: J Lindsay)

The company employed 50 000 staff over its short life (1950 – 1975); 5 000 -7 000 at any one time. It was regarded as the largest private employer in the Sydney area. The workforce was made up largely of migrant workers. This presented unique challenges for management. Thirty five different languages were spoken at the location (in many cases, hand signals were the only form of communication). The company even offered English classes to help assimilate the workers more quickly.





Figure 9 Apprentices (photo: BMCLHG)





Figure 10 Apprentice marching practice (photo: BMCLHG)





Figure 11 BMC Youth Orchestra (photo: BMCLHG)

A brief history of the site:

Originally, the location was a swamp. In 1908 it was turned into a racetrack. Thirty nine years later, on one of his many trips here, Lord Nuffield (the founder of Morris Motors Ltd) had noticed the Victoria Park racecourse was for sale. He advised his company to purchase the site for car manufacturing, but when they voted against such a move, Sir William Morris purchased it himself (ironically to be sold back to his company for a sizeable profit a year later). In 1949, development of the site was approved and in 1950 car production commenced at Zetland (also referred to as 'Waterloo' and 'Victoria Park').

Physical layout of the location

Of the 115 acres the site occupied, Nuffield Australia (later to become BMC Australia and Leyland Australia) took up possession of 57 acres of the site, with the following being subdivided and sold to 'feeder' companies such as: Champion Spark Plug Company, James N Kirby, Joseph Lucas and Olympic Tyre & Rubber Company.



The buildings

Some of the buildings housed on the 57 acres were:

CKD Plant

Unit Plant, where engines, gearboxes, rear axles and suspensions were manufactured.

Press Shop, where body panels were pressed and body shells assembled.

Car Assembly Building (CAB), where painting and assembly of vehicles occurred.

Spare Parts warehouse.

Personnel Office.

Employee Amenities Building.

Garage.

The site was a self-sustainable location for the manufacture of motor vehicles.

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 31st 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



The years come and go, time passes on and sixty-four's draining away.
But no matter what happens, Service Bulletins, we're sure, are here to stay.
Through rain and hail, sleet and snow, the summer heat, the drought -
Irrespective of the circumstances, the Bulletins must go out !

Whatever the month, whatever the make, there're bound to be modifications,
So we send three Bulletins out to you with expert explanations
On how to proceed in carrying out the changes we have made,
And try to help the boys who work within the motor trade

First there's the index to give you a guide to this valuable information,
It's printed on pink at the beginning of this R.M.C. publication.
Following this, come cars and trucks, tractors and service tools,
Then general information on our policies and rules.

On receipt of this valuable document, it should be read throughout,
Then passed around to personnel to make sure there is no doubt
Of ignorance of latest changes and of our specifications,
Because when failing to comply with these, it could lead to complications.

Our Bulletin should then be filed in its correct position
Amongst the others you've received in this knowledgeable edition.
Keep it handy, keep it close, read it through once in a while,
Referring to it regularly will help you through many a mile.

Let us hope our relationship through Bulletins will survive
Through the happy and prosperous year of nineteen sixty five.

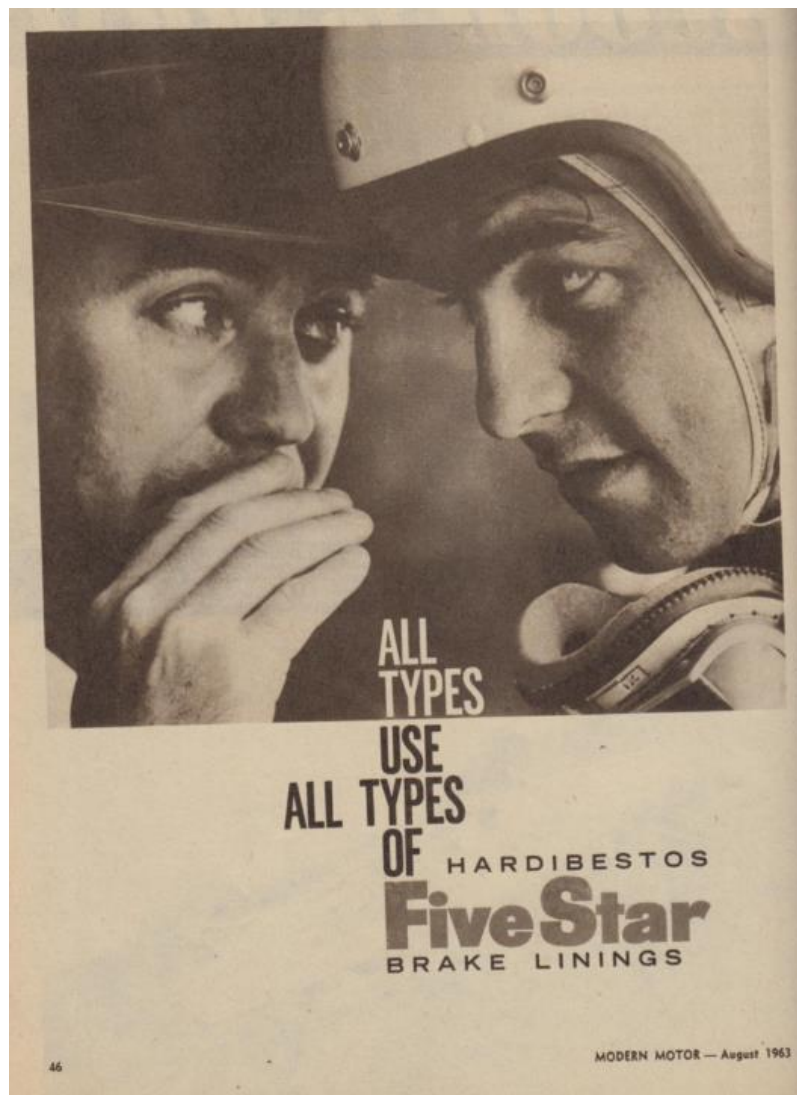
Thanks to John Lindsay, the following address to the Institution of Auto and Aero Engineers, on the 9th of April, 1958 gives a great appreciation of the complete operation at Zetland/Waterloo.

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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