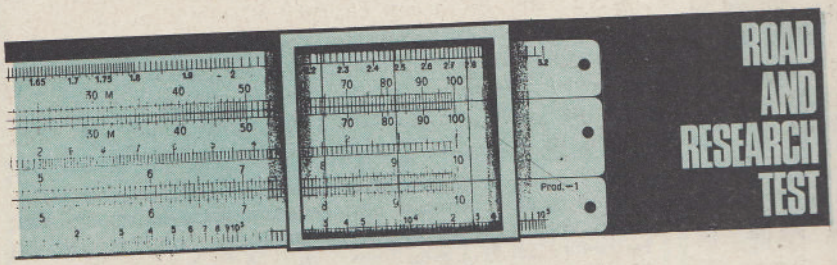
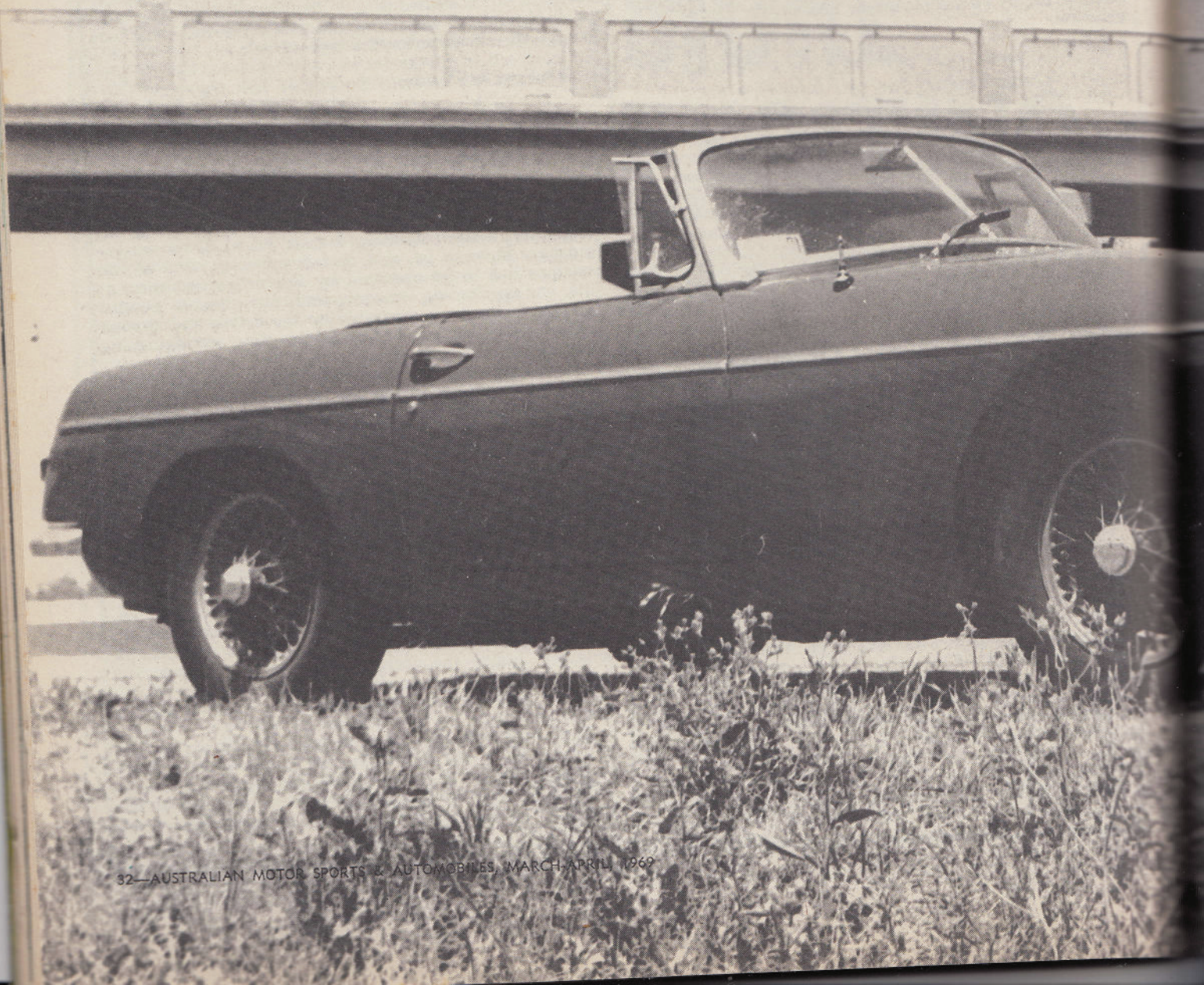
JUST HOW FABULOUS IS THE MGB?





PETER ROBINSON TAKES A SERIOUS LOOK AT THE BEST-SELLING SPORTS CAR IN AUSTRALIA

IN BRIEF:

Price: $3325.
Engine capacity: 1798 cc.
Brake horsepower: 95.
Max. speed: 106.9 mph.
Accel., 0-60 mph: 12.1 secs.
Consumption: 25.8 mpg.
Insurance rating: 4.
Warranty: 12/12000.

Exterior shape hasn't altered at all and some would argue that it looks pretty old-fashioned. There are still plenty of buyers, though.

ANY car which can capture 50 per cent of all the sales in its segment of the market must be considered a success. When it can do this for six years in a row without a styling or major mechanical change, then either the opposition must be very weak or the car itself is fabulously good.

In the case of the MGB a bit of both applies. The competition is almost non-existent and, while the car is an excellent vehicle, it could and perhaps should be better than it is.

In its Mk. II form the "Bee" surpasses all previous MGs simply because most of the small but annoying shortcomings, which MOTOR has criticised over the years, have finally been remedied.

First gear is now synchronised, second gear ratio is higher to reduce the hole between second and third, two-speed windscreen wipers have finally arrived and a locking petrol cap is fitted. The Sprite/Midget has always had a locking petrol cap but not the MG, so this peculiar anomaly has been sorted out.

There have been other modifications: Since the "Bee" uses a twin carby version of the BMC 1800 cc engine, it now has, like the new Austin 1800, an inverted oil filter and alternator and also a different radiator and oil cooler. The knock-offs on the wire wheels have been replaced by large, single, hexagonal nuts, the bonnet opens higher than before and both it and the boot lid are slightly larger. Excellent recessed door handles replace the old, unsatisfactory plastic handles, metric calibrations are used on the oil pressure and water temperature gauges and there are safety window winders.

A wider transmission tunnel has been standardised to make room for the optional automatic, a ball-shaped gearshift knob is supposed to make changes easier and a fan-boosted fresh air ventilation system, to assist demisting, is provided. Oh, and there are the inevitable Mk. II badges.

The back end of the new "Bee" is clearly identifiable by the uninitiated for in addition to the traditional hexagonal MG emblem there is MGB lettering above it, a Mk. II badge and either "overdrive" or "automatic" script depending upon which model it is.

The normal four-speed "Bee" now sells for $3195, the overdrive model costs $3325 and the automatic costs $3445, so none of them can be called cheap. The last of the Mk. Is, which had overdrive, cost $3095, so the increase amounts to $230.

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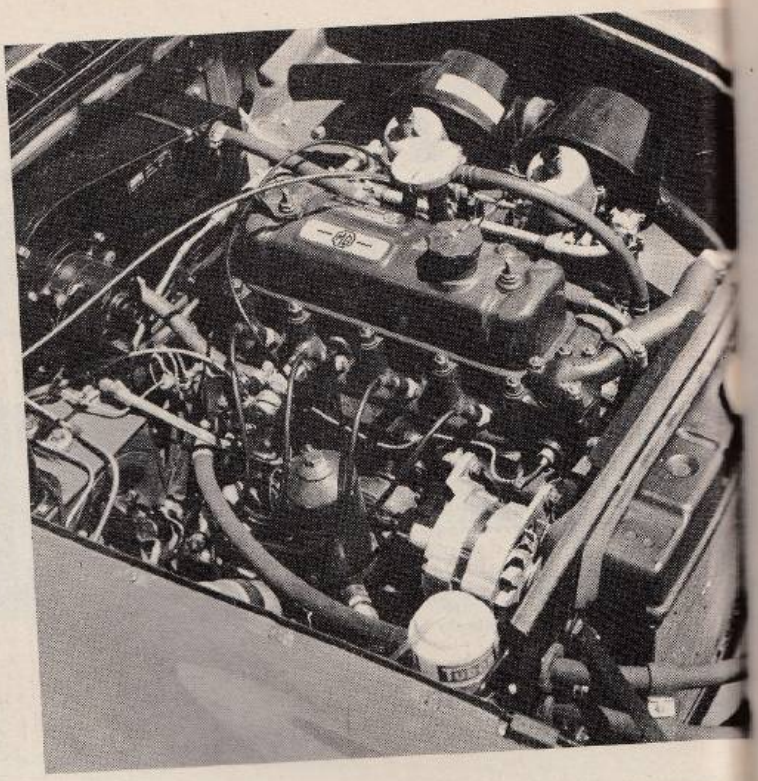


RIGHT: Familiar old engine hasn't changed much over the years but still gives smooth performance. Redesigned radiator, inverted oil-cooler and alternator are new.

FAR RIGHT: Boot is small even by sports car standards. The hood and spare wheel take up lots of space, but it will hold lots of soft baggage.

EXTREME RIGHT: Cockpit is roomy and comfortable even for six footers. Trim, straight gear-lever and door handles are new. Steering wheel is too big.

By the way, you can disregard all other road test reports which stated that a heater is now standard equipment.

It isn't.

BMC's policy of making minor improvements throughout the life of the model without facelifting it also applies to the "Bee", which late in the life of the Mk. I was sold with reversing lights, radial ply tyres (Olympic GTs), revised anti-roll bars, laminated windscreen, headlight flasher and overdrive, all of which are continued on the Mk. II.

Three new colours have been added to the range, Sandown Red, GTO Green and the now unavoidable Daffodil Yellow.

None of these changes, apart from the overdrive, make very much difference to the way the "Bee" feels on the road. It still handles reasonably well, although there are an increasing number of sedans of around the same price which can show it a scrubbed set of rubbers on a twisty road as well as in a straight line. There is a bit of roll oversteer at the limit, although at slower speeds and particularly on tight corners it understeers a lot.

The back axle becomes upset on rough roads and when making full throttle standing starts. It's about time it was replaced by something a little less archaic than a beam axle and leaf spring. The steering wheel is far too big, a long way from the dashboard and, although the steering is direct and precise, it is heavy at parking speeds and almost lacking in any self-centring.

Because the steering wheel is so far from the dashboard the driver can't change gears and flick into and out of overdrive simultaneously without taking both hands from the wheel — which can make things a bit hairy to say the least.

The actual overdrive switch is just to the right of the fuel gauge and almost in line with the righthand side of the wheel, but it is just not long enough for casual use. This means that most drivers cannot make the most of the six available speeds, or show off by going up through the box from first to second to third to third overdrive to fourth to fourth overdrive and back down again for a real piece of oneupmanship.

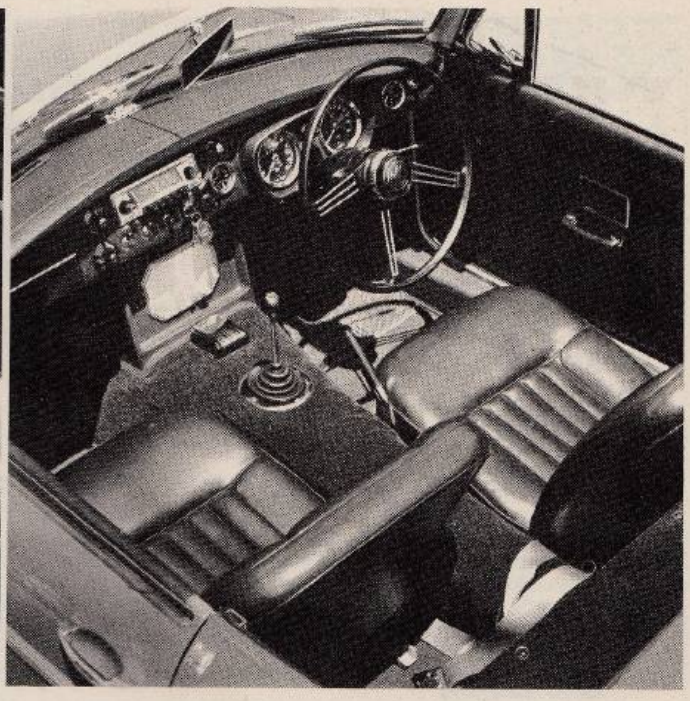
Those poor people over six feet tall, who have been searching unsuccessfully for a livable cockpit amongst sedans, should try the "Bee" for it is endowed with a very comfortable driving position. The pedals are well away but poorly positioned in relation to one another, and it is only the big steering wheel which interferes just a little. If it were an inch or two smaller and on an adjustable column, things would be perfect. Maybe we'll see it all on the Mk. III in 1972.

Shorter drivers find the pedals are too far away unless they move the seat so far forward the steering wheel tickles their chest and they have to adopt an elbows out driving position. There is so much rearward adjustment in the seats even six foot six inch drivers can be accommodated.

The remote control gearlever has been straightened, but I found it too far back on the tunnel and a trifle high. BMC claims it has changed the gearshift to be more positive, but I found it somewhat stiff and notchy and needing a solid knock to get into reverse.

Some people like it, but those who have been brought up on the rubbery changes of VWs and Porsches don't reckon it rates much above a column change.

The seats are soft and large but only have a limited amount of back-rest adjustment and it can only be done by spanner. Young marrieds will be pleased to know there is enough room behind the bucket seats for a couple of young kids so the "Bee" need not be sold by pathetic "stork forces sale" classified advertisements.



Not much else has changed inside. The new door openers work very well but the window winders are unduly stiff and the glove box still has to be opened by key, which means, unless a spare is carried, it can only be used when the engine is switched off. Intending owners should plan on getting another made for their girlfriends.

Visibility is good although the windscreen is shallow for tall people and shorter drivers find they sit well down in the car and tend to look through the steering wheel. There is no external mirror and the interior one is small and doesn't give a very wide range of view.

Apart from the stiff gearchange the "Bee" is an easy car to drive; the clutch is very forgiving and the old long-stroke engine surprisingly flexible and smooth, although it does idle lumpily.

Acceleration hasn't been improved since the car was introduced in 1963, so it can't be considered a rapid machine by today's standards — not that it ever really was, but the advances made by sedans during this period have been immense. The Fiat 125, for instance, is much quicker than the "Bee".

Overdrive makes all the difference to the car's touring capabilities. It cuts the engine revs from 4500 rpm in direct top to 3700 rpm in overdrive at an indicated 90 mph to give a magnificent "long legs" feel and also superior fuel consumption.

In fact, the "Bee" in overdrive form is a very good long distance touring car. The ride is firm without being uncomfortable and, like most thoroughbreds, it gets better as speeds rise. Lifting the right foot at high speeds gives the car a disconcerting wander. BMC has done its homework on the exhaust system for it doesn't boom as the old one did.

With overdrive on third and top there are four gears to play with in most road situations and it is marvellous fun to rush through a series of twisty bits flicking the car between overdrive third and third without having to worry about depressing the clutch. There is a moment's hesitation after the switch is flicked before the overdrive engages but the change back is instantaneous. If accelerating really hard, it pays to drop the clutch when engaging the overdrive or otherwise the car jerks a bit. In normal driving a slight lifting of the right foot is enough for smooth travelling.

Overdrive third is lower than fourth, so all four ratios are decidedly usable apart from the previously mentioned difficulty of reaching the switch without lifting from the steering wheel. If the switch was built into the gearlever it would be a 100 per cent improvement.

MG knows how to build a car that stops. The brakes on the "Bee" are progressive, require light pedal pressures and don't fade.

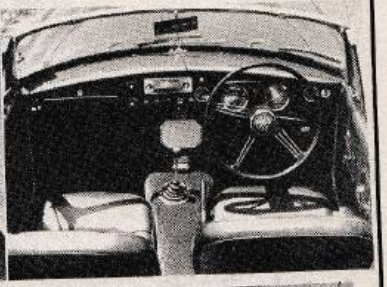
The hood is still one of those which is taken down and folded up into the boot. It is easy to pull down but more difficult to put up and really needs two people if it is to be done without jamming fingers or taking all day about it. But once up it keeps the rain out, although it is still not completely free from draughts.

The boot isn't very big but will take one reasonably large suitcase and lots of soft luggage; of course, there is always the area behind the seats.

The "Bee" is much better than its specifications would lead you to believe. It has been developed to the point where it is still able to compete with more advanced cars purely because it is a pleasure to drive and has proved reliable and tractable. I doubt if it will be replaced inside two years, so if you can see $3325 value in it, and only those people who love sports cars can, then I suggest you buy one rather than join the herds heading towards the local GMH dealer and the Monaro. Who knows, I might get one myself one day.

AMS ROAD AND RESEARCH TEST No. 62

Make: MG.
Model: MGB Mk. II Overdrive.
Options fitted: Radio, heater, number plate frames.
Test Mileage: In, 4068; Out, 4464.
Total: 396 miles.



SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE:
Type: Water cooled, 4-cylinder, overhead valves, front mounted.
Bore: 80.26 mm, 3.16 ins.
Stroke: 88.90 mm, 3.50 ins.
Capacity: 1798 cc, 109.8 cu. ins.
Compression ratio: 8.8.
Carburetion: Twin SU.
Power output: 95 bhp at 5400 rpm. 110 ft. lb. Torque at 3000 rpm.

SUSPENSION:
Front: Independent, coil springs, wishbones, anti-roll bar, hydraulic shock absorbers.
Rear: Live axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs, hydraulic shock absorbers.

BRAKES:
Front: Disc, 10.75 in diameter.
Rear: Drum, 10 in. diameter.

STEERING:
Gear: Rack and pinion.
Turns lock to lock: 2.75. Turning circle: 32 feet.

TYRES:
Size: 165 x 14. Make fitted: Olympic GT radial.
Pressures: F, 24 psi; R. 30 psi,

CHASSIS: Unitary.

DIMENSIONS:
Wheelbase: 7 ft. 7 in. Length: 12 ft. 9 in.
Width: 4 ft. 11.3 in. Height: 4 ft. 1.4 in.
Track, front 49 in., rear 49.25 in.
Ground clearance: 5 in. Weight: 1920 lb.
Fuel tank capacity: 12 gallons.

TRANSMISSION

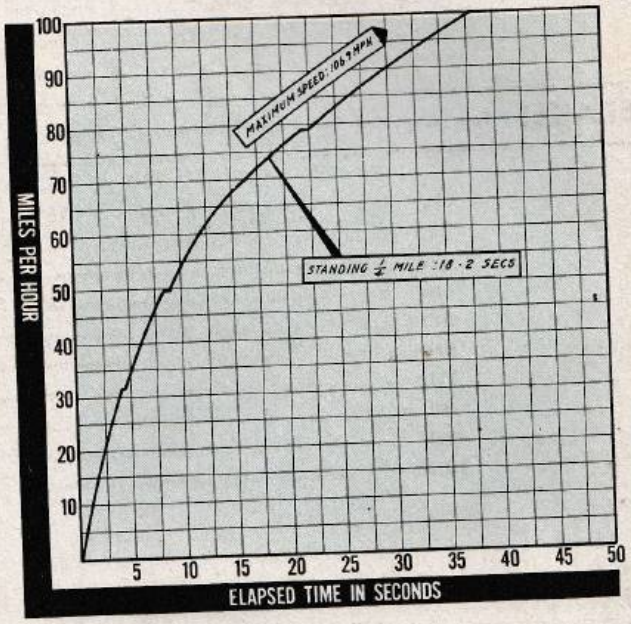
Type: Four-speed, all synchromesh, floor mounted change plus overdrive on third and fourth.

Gear	Ratio	Overall	mph/ max speed at 1000 rpm	5400 rpm
1st	3.448	13.446	5.25	28.35 mph
2nd	2.171	8.470	8.00	43.20 mph
3rd	1.384	5.400	13.00	70.20 mph
3rd o/d	1.135	4.430	15.25	82.35 mph
4th	1.000	3.900	17.25	93.15 mph
4th o/d	0.823	3.200	20.50	110.70 mph
Rev.		12.098		

Final drive ratio: 3.90.
Clutch: Single dry plate, hydraulic actuation, 8 in. diameter.

TESTERS' CHECK LIST

Brakes: Good.
Steering: Good.
Suspension:
Ride: Good.
Handling: Good.
Controls: Good.
Interior:
Visibility: Good.
Instruments: Good.
Seats: Good.
Storage Space: Good.
Noise Level: Good.
Heating: Good (when fitted).
Ventilation: Good.
Finish: Good.



PERFORMANCE

Maximum speeds in gears:
First: 32 mph.
Second: 49 mph.
Third: 78 mph.
Third o/d: 97 mph.
Fourth: 102 mph.
Fourth o/d: 106.9 mph (maximum speed).

ACCELERATION:

0-30 mph: 3.7 secs.	0-60 mph: 12.1 secs.
0-40 mph: 5.9 secs.	0-70 mph: 16.8 secs.
0-50 mph: 8.6 secs.	0-80 mph: 22.7 secs.

Standing quarter mile: 18.2 secs.
Fuel consumption: 25.8 mpg.

HOW THEY COMPARE

FUEL CONSUMPTION

AVERAGE MPG

	15	20	25	30	35	40	45
MGB Mk. II O/D ($3325)			25.8				
Datsun 2000 ($3495)			23.2				
Fiat 124 Coupe ($3648)			25.2				
Holden Monaro GTS ($3090)			22.5				
Triumph TR5 ($3995)			21.8				

TOP SPEED

MPH

	70	75	80	90	95	100	105	110	115	120	125
MGB Mk. II O/D							106.9				
Datsun 2000											120
Fiat 124 Coupe								109.1			
Holden Monaro GTS							102				
Triumph TR5											116.2

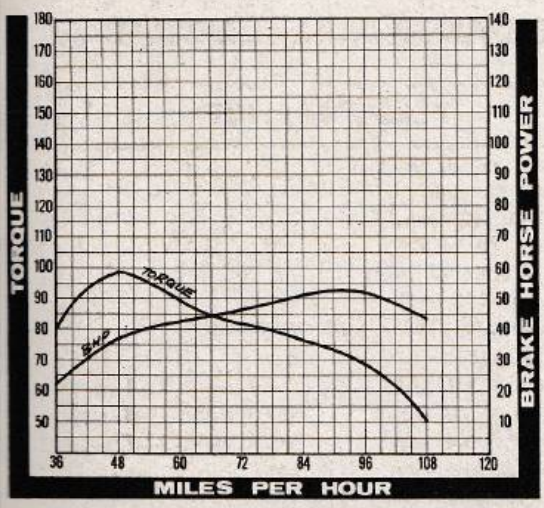
ACCELERATION

0-60 MPH SECONDS

	30	28	26	24	22	20	18	16	14	12	10	8	6
MGB Mk. II O/D									12.1				
Datsun 2000												8.4	
Fiat 124 Coupe									11.2				
Holden Monaro GTS									12.5				
Triumph TR5												8.1	

BRAKES Ten stops from two-thirds maximum speed (71 mph) at one minute intervals.

	100	125	150	175	200	225	250	275	300 feet
1st				158 feet					
2nd				163 feet					
3rd					184 feet				
4th				174 feet					
5th					182 feet				
6th					186 feet				
7th					181 feet				
8th					179 feet				
9th				170 feet					
10th				172 feet					



PERFECTUNE DYNAMOMETER TEST

SPEEDOMETER CORRECTIONS

Indicated	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
Actual	21	29	38	48	58	67	76	86	95

TACHOMETER CORRECTIONS

Indicated	1000	2000	3000	4000	5000	6000
Actual	1000	2000	3000	3850	4850	5850

Maximum rear wheel bhp: 52 at 5210 engine rpm.

Maximum rear wheel torque: 98 ft. lb. at 2600 engine rpm.

David Bennett comments: "A well known and rather dated design, the engine responds to head work, a mild cam and richer needles, although fuel consumption suffers a little. No cooling problems at all."

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TOP SPEED

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	70	75	80	90	95	100	105	110	115	120	125
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Holden Monaro GTS						102					
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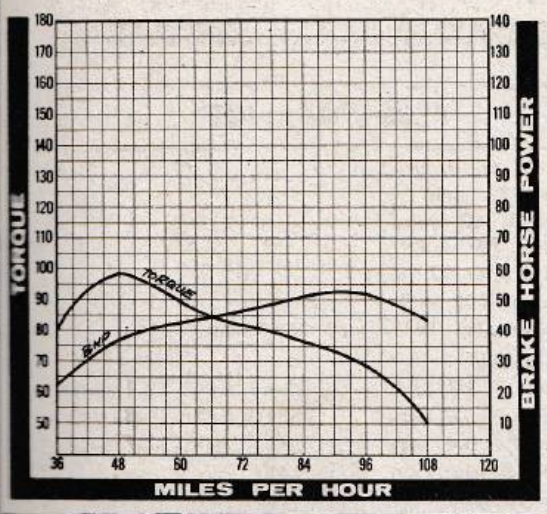

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