

The 'B' Down-under

Words and modern photos by Craig Watson.



The history of the MGB in the UK is well documented. Not so well recorded is the history of the MGB in Australia. Thanks to a new website, all the facts are finally beginning to emerge.

Many car makers, Austin and Morris among them, began assembling cars in Australia after World War Two, to take advantage of tax concessions for locally produced cars.

By the time the MGA was launched in the UK in 1955, the 43-acre BMC assembly plant at Zetland still only consisted of one CKD assembly building, the Unit Factory (engines, gearboxes, axles, etc) and a handful of smaller administrative buildings.

The CKD building was assembling Series II Morris Minors in two- and four- door saloon, Tourer, Traveller, utility and van versions, Series II Morris Oxford and the short-lived Morris Isis. There were also around a dozen models of Morris and Austin commercial vehicles, from small vans to 7-ton trucks, being assembled in the factory.

In short, space was limited and it simply wasn't practical to take on another model at the time, so assembly of the MGA was contracted out to Pressed Metal Corporation (PMC) in Enfield, about 14km to the West of Zetland.

Pressed Metal Corporation was completely independent of BMC through this period, but it did have ties to Austin. The NSW distributor for Austin vehicles from 1918 was Larke Hoskins Group, and in the late 1930s it established PMC, as 70% shareholder, to build motor bodies on a 22-acre site in Cosgrove Rd, Enfield.

The Austin A40 was assembled at PMC from shortly after the War, with the company even developing its own unique utility version. Similarly, they assembled A50 utility and other Austin products. Land Rovers were also built there from the early 1950s, originally from CKD kits but later the aluminium body panels were stamped at Enfield, with the chassis coming in as complete units.

Assembly of MGA 1500 began at Enfield in October 1957. By February 1958 they

were being built at a rate of three per day, according to Pedr Davis in *Sports Car World* magazine at the time.

While Twin Cams and coupes were imported Completely Built Up, the 1600 MKI and MKII models were also assembled in Australia.

MGA 1500 engines and gearboxes were assembled then cold-run and hot-run tested, before being trucked to Enfield, while the chassis frame arrived complete.

However, Enfield did the rest – from welding the body panels together, assembling the suspension and chassis components, to painting, trimming and final assembly.

“Pressed Metal Corporation are particularly proud of their baked enamel finish”, *SCW* reported, “claiming that it is among the very best available this side of the Equator.”

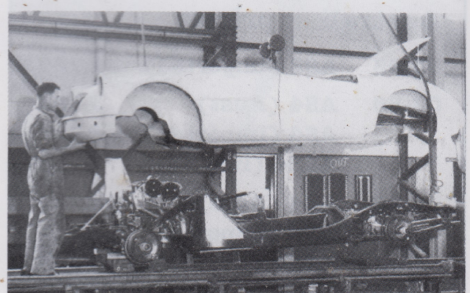
With the introduction of the MGB in 1962, it was a natural progression that it would be assembled at Pressed Metal. At this time, Mini production was in full swing at Zetland and commercial vehicles were still also being assembled in the CKD building.



Zetland 1950 - pony track still operating.



Enfield - MGA (left) and A50 utility



MGA assembly at Enfield.



Australian publicity photo for early MGB.

Meanwhile, production of Austin Freeway sedan and station wagon, Wolseley 24/80 and Morris Major Elite were taking place in the new Car Assembly Building (CAB1), which had been completed in 1958.

Tractors were also being assembled, from Semi-Knocked Down packs, in the company garage.

So, MGB assembly began at Enfield in April 1963, under similar circumstances to the MGA, with the official release on 10 May.

It is likely that the decision to assemble the MGB in Australia was made even before UK production began, but there are a number of reasons why it took almost a year for local production to get under way.

As reported in Issue 1, production in the UK began in May 1962 and of the first 500 built only two were right-hand-drive. The vast majority of early production was for the US market: 3,978 (88%) of the 4,518 built in 1962.

Secondly, there was always a time lag of around three months between CKD packs being made up in the UK and arriving in Australia. Peter Davis, whose job included making up the Knock Down Allocation Schedule (KDAS) said that KDAS had to be sent to England a full 12 months ahead of any model change.

Thirdly, stocks of MGAs at Enfield, usually a full month's production on hand at any time,

and on the water from the UK were sufficient for assembly to continue until mid-1962.

There was also the time required for setting up the assembly jigs and equipment and generally fitting out the factory for the change from the MGA, which had a chassis, to the monocoque MGB.

Although Zetland had state-of-the-art transfer machines for working on B-series engines, in four and six cylinders, all engines for the MGB (as well as MGA 1600 engines) came in as CBU. This was not unusual, as other engines also came in CBU, including A-series for the Mini at the time, and for the Cooper and Cooper S models in later years.

Initially, virtually everything came in the CKD packs from the UK, but local input quickly grew. Even from the beginning, though, items such as the interior trim, batteries and tyres were locally sourced.

In order to reduce costs, Australian assembly was standardized as much as possible and some items that were options in the UK were either not offered or were standard.

For example, all locally-assembled MGBs came with wire wheels – though usually painted grey, with chrome as an option. All Australian MGBs also included an oil-cooler, mounted ahead of the radiator, and a front anti-roll bar. The fold-down hood was not offered on Aussie Bs, with all receiving the pack-away hood, and only in black, right up until 1970.



BMC Rosette - June 1963

A couple of interesting problems arose when assembly began, which have latterly served to cause considerable confusion to historians and restorers.

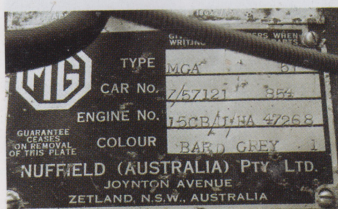
The first relates to the car identification numbers, specifically the model Type. When the MGA 1600 was introduced, BMC changed to a new numbering format with a letter Y at the start to denote Australian production.

Thus the MGA 1600 in the UK was type GHN (where G stands for MG, H for engine size 1400cc to 1999cc and N for two-seat roadster), and in Australia should have been YGHN, but for reasons unknown, YGHN2 was used.

This may have been a logical step, as the MGA 1500 was the first open two-seater MG assembled in Australia, so the 1600 was the second in the series. This, however, is purely conjecture.

The English MGA 1600 Mk2 was therefore GHN2 and in Australia YGHN3. So when the MGB came on stream, GHN3 in the UK, its Australian version YGHN3 had already been used. To realign with the UK, the decision was made to stay with YGHN3 even though two completely different MG models would have the same model type designation.

The first Australian MGB was listed as YGHN, though the very next car is YGHN3. This may have been because of some uncertainty,



MGA plate (left); Early 1963 MGB plate (centre) Nuffield; mid-1965 (right) no UK car number.



Compliance plates from 01-70



Early Enfield-built MGBs feature pull door handles, pack-away roof and chrome grille.

given that YGHN3 had already been taken by the MGA 1600 Mk II, but most likely was simply a factory floor error.

The other problem that occurred is that many of the early MGBs assembled locally were fitted with ID plates identifying the manufacturer as Nuffield (Australia) Pty Ltd, Zetland, and also carried the Morris Motors emblem.

How or why this happened is a complete mystery and it is not known exactly how many cars were affected. It has been suggested that Pressed Metal may have had Nuffield plates left over from production of earlier model cars assembled in the factory and that a shortage of the correct plates supplied from Zetland meant the old plates were fitted to early MGBs.

However, as Larke Hoskins were Austin distributors, it appears that PMC did not assemble any Nuffield products until the formation of BMC Australia in 1954, so it would be strange for them to have Nuffield plates at all. It is equally unlikely that the plates came from the UK, as they were identified as Nuffield (Australia).

The only logical explanation seems to be that

Australian prices:		
04-63 (MM)	Release	£1,365
06-65 (W)	manual	£1,395
02-66 (W)	manual	£1,420
		\$2,840
04-67 (W)	manual	\$2,840
02-68 (W)	manual	\$2,849
03-69 (MM)	MkII o/d	\$3,325
07-69 (MM)	automatic	\$3,445
01-70 (W)	manual	\$3,095
01-70 (W)	automatic	\$3,445
09-72 (W)	manual o/d	\$3,525
09-72 (W)	automatic	\$3,651
(MM)	- Modern Motor magazine	
(W)	- Wheels magazine	

for whatever reason – maybe a shortage of the correct plates, or Nuffield plates left over from earlier assembly, or zero care factor – the plates were supplied from Zetland.

The fact that these plates carry the Zetland address seems to be one of the reasons many people have concluded that all MGBs assembled in Australia were done so at Zetland. However, as Peter Davis explains; “all sub-contract assemblers used plates with the Austin/Nuffield/BMC address.”

On early cars the UK production number is listed, which fits in the production schedule with Abingdon-built cars, followed by the Australian car number. By 1965, possibly late 1964, only the Australian car number was stamped into the plate.

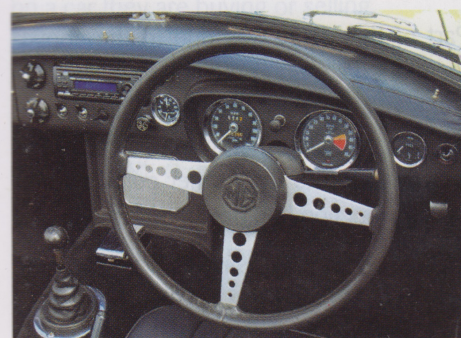
Enfield plates were stamped by hand from the front, and are therefore fairly untidy, while Zetland plates are machine stamped, from the rear of the plate. From about June to December 1969 no ID plates were fitted to MGBs, which was common practice with all BMC cars of the period. From 1 January 1970 all Australian cars were fitted with Compliance Plates.

It terms of specification, because the major components were supplied from the UK, Aussie MGBs received the same on-going production changes as the UK cars, though some months behind because of the same delays that affected the MGA.

Also, because of the low volume production, virtually every shipment contained some engineering changes, often many.

For example, Positive Crankcase Ventilation was introduced in the UK in February 1964, but this change, identified by the engine prefix changing from 18G to 18GA, did not take place in Australia until August. Similarly, the five-bearing engine arrived in the UK in





By 1972 there were countless changes, but it was still uniquely MGB.

October 1964 and in Australia from about March 1965.

Major body changes included press button door handles replacing the pull-out type in about July 1965 (April in UK); the fuel tank was changed from 10gal (46lt) to 12.7gal (55lt) and the mounting improved at around the same time (UK March).

Where UK MGBs had a variety of interior colour options, in Australia the choice was originally limited to black, with contrasting white piping on the seats and door cards, or red with white piping. By late 1964 the red option consisted only of the seats in an otherwise all-black interior, and the following year the contrasting piping was deleted. By mid-1966 only black seats were available.

Although overdrive was available in British-built MGBs from early in 1963, this feature was not offered in Aussie cars until June 1967. The last 500 or so Mk1 Enfield-built MGBs are often called Mk1½ cars, because of the number of MkII improvements that were included from late 1967: radial-ply tyres, a stronger anti-roll bar, reversing lights, laminated windscreen, headlamp flasher and a Salisbury rear axle.

It is not clear why, but these overdrive cars were still designated YGHN3, even though they had a different engine prefix: 18GB/RU/H because of the overdrive.

Big changes were in the wind for 1968. BMC bought Pressed Metal in its entirety and MGB assembly was moved to the Zetland factory in February – although production did not get under way until about August due to problems setting up the line (see later).

Prior to this change, a Parts and Accessories Division had been built at Moorebank, near Liverpool, and the P&A building at Zetland became a storage and unpacking area and

also incorporated the Service Department, Service Training and Workshop and the Competitions Department until the factory closure.

A new container receiving and storage building was completed in 1968, which then facilitated the move of that part of the former P&A building becoming Car Assembly Building 3 (CAB3) for MG assembly.

To add more confusion, in 1966 a new administration building had been built on the Eastern side of the factory site, moving the official address of the factory from Joynton Ave, Zetland, to Sth Dowling St, Waterloo.

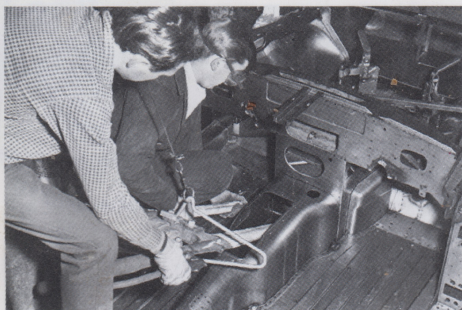
MGBs assembled at Zetland/Waterloo all benefitted from the plant's Rotodip rust prevention and pre-treatment facility in the CAB1. There will be a full story on the Rotodip in a later issue but, simply put, the car bodies in bare metal went through a series of anti-rust pre-treatment and primer

Aussie Production by year:

1963 (Apr-Dec).....	444
1964	802
1965	915
1966	1084
1967	1228
1968	1026
1969	1089
1970	1053
1971	883
1972 (to 6 Nov)	561
Total	9085

The figures for 1963 to 1971 are from *Leyland Parts News*, December 1972. The 1972 figure has been extrapolated from the figures in the table on p56

In his book, *Original MGB*, Anders Clausager says 9090 CKD packs were sent to Australia. John Lindsay believes the difference could be due to jig development, damaged vehicles and spare parts.



Mk I CKD training - 1966

tanks and were rotated through each to ensure every surface was coated.

From there it was over to the Paint Shop where stoving enamel was sprayed, and baked, then the painted car bodies were returned to CAB3 for final assembly.

Meanwhile the engines, still received CBU, were hot-run tested for about half an hour, undergoing 29 checks and adjustments, in the Unit Factory. Suspension assemblies were also built up in the Unit Factory before moving into CAB3 to be united with the bodies.

Three mistakes marked the start of assembly at Waterloo, two of which held up series production by a few months. The first was a major embarrassment, as John Lindsay, formerly in Quality Control in CAB3, reveals. "When they transferred MGB from Enfield, for some reason they (BMC) didn't buy the jigs. I think they must have thought we'd build a better MGB, so we'd build our own jigs."

"It was Dorman, the people who built spot-weld guns, who were given the task of building these jigs, and they looked beautiful. So, we set up all the sub-assemblies into them and made sure everything fit. The big day came when we actually welded the first floor panel together and so-on, and then it struck us that although it fitted in the jigs, no-one had thought about getting a complete assembly out, because no-one had welded

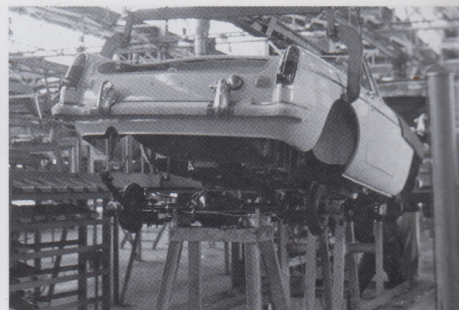


Early assembly at Waterloo. Note the indicators outboard of the parker lights.

anything together. So, we had to dismantle the jigs to get the floorpan out. Then it was a bit of work on the weekend to actually change the jigs and make the jig forms swing out, so we could get the components out."

On top of this, the first twelve or so cars assembled had to have their door openings changed and the cars sent back through the paint shop again, as detailed on the website www.mgbsmadeinaustralia.org. "Feeling they could improve on the doors being produced in the UK, Zetland workers set about creating their own templates in order to improve the fitting of the doors, reducing the size of the gaps. The doors were a much improved fit - EXCEPT, when the vehicle was lowered to the ground under its own weight, the slight movement that this caused was enough to render the doors unopenable!"

The third "mistake" was less serious but merely adds to the confusion for historians and restorers of early cars assembled at Waterloo, with the indicator/parker lights fitted the wrong way around - that is with the indicators on the outside of the parkers. It has been suggested this was deliberate as the people at Waterloo felt they looked better with the indicators outboard of the parkers. However, it was changed when the new body shells, with these lights placed closer to the grille, started arriving from the UK and it is not known how many cars were affected.



Body meets suspension at Waterloo.

With assembly at Waterloo local content in the MGB was 45%, on value, but major changes still followed on from UK changes.

The MkII included a larger transmission tunnel, and was available with automatic transmission, using the Borg Warner Type 35. Some 228 automatic MGBs were assembled in Australia.

Other changes included recessed interior door handles, as used on the 1800 (ADO17) saloons, anti-burst door locks, softer rear suspension, an alternator, the heater was fitted as standard and there were multitude minor changes to the engine.

The MkII was introduced with the start of production at Waterloo in August 1968, with the official launch in February 1969 - a full 14 months after the UK.

Part of this delay was due to the above-mentioned start-up problems, while part of it was due to all cars at Enfield having MkI bodies: evidence that surplus MkI bodies were shipped to the former colonies after MkII production had begun in the UK.

It seems some MkI cars, with and without overdrive, were partly assembled at Enfield before production changed over, and were completed at Waterloo.

The first 257 MkII cars were designated YGHN4, afterwards changing to YGHN5. It has not been ascertained what the difference

Australian Production by model:

Car number prefix	Model	Engine prefix	Car numbers	Production dates	No built
YGHN3	MkI non-overdrive	18G/U/H	501 to 5559	Apr '63 to Jul '68	5059
	Ditto with PCV	18GA/U/H	(part of above)		
	Ditto with 5-bearing crank	18GB/U/H	(part of above)		
YGHN3	MkI overdrive	18GB/RU/H	(part of above)	Jun '67 to Jul '68	(approx 200)
YGHN4	MkII overdrive	18GD/RWe/H	501 to 757	Aug '68 to Dec '68	257
YGHN5 (& YHN5)	MkII overdrive	18GD/RWe/H	758 to 2276	Dec '68 to Aug '70	1519
YGHN6 (& YHN6)	MkII non-overdrive	18GD/We/H	501 to 860	Sep '68 to Aug '70	360
YHN7	MkII automatic	18GD/Rc/H	501 to 656	Sep '68 to Aug '70	156
YHN9	MkII facelift overdrive	18GG/RWe/H	501 to 2162	Sep '70 to Dec '72	1662
	from end 1971	18V582/H			
YHN10	MkII facelift automatic	18GG/Rc/H	501 to 572	Sep '70 to Dec '72	72
				Total	9085

(YHN8 was allocated to facelift manual, non-overdrive, but was not used)

From early 1969, all 18GD engines replaced with 18GG, with carburettor crankcase ventilation instead of closed-circuit breathing systems. Engine designations became: YGHN5 (YHN5) - 18GG/RWe/H; YGHN6 (YHN6) - 18GG/We/H; YHN7 - 18GG/Rc/H



Photos by Tom Aczel

MkII, "Overdrive" and "Automatic" badges were unique on Australian MGBs.

between the two models was, but the car numbers appear to have continued through for both series.

This was contrary to the normal Australian practice of reverting to number 501 for the start of any new model designation. For example, the non-overdrive MkII was designated YGHN6 and reverted to car number 501. Car numbers in the UK on the other hand were continuous, through all model designation changes.

This all seems a bit pedantic, for sure, but is typical of the confusion that abounds, not only with MGB but with other BMC vehicles as well. It is difficult enough for historians, let alone someone trying to restore a car to original spec, or to identify what is original on a car they are buying or selling.

In late 1969 the company name changed to British Leyland Motor Corporation (Australia) and the G designation in the number prefixes was dropped.

The MGB was face-lifted in 1970 (YHN9 for manual and YHN10 for automatic) with a black recessed grille, squared-off taillights, fold-down hood (finally), smaller steering wheel, changes to some of the badges, the bonnet changed from aluminium to steel and overdrive became standard on manual cars.

Although not an official designation, these cars have always been known as MGB MkII "BL" – for British Leyland.

1971 brought rubber-faced bumper overriders and self-propping boot and bonnet struts and, later in the year, the introduction of head restraints.

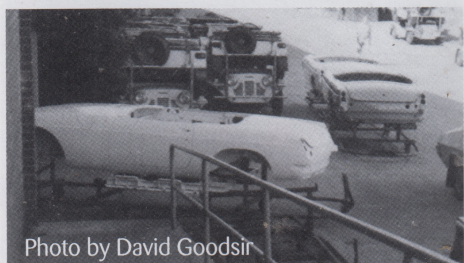


Photo by David Goodsir

Painted bodies return to CAB3 - c1971.



This overdrive switch was common to all Aussie-built MGBs with overdrive.

While the MGB had maintained around 1,000 sales per year in Australia since 1965, a drop of nearly 20% in 1971, and down to one per day by early 1972, combined with proposed changes to the local content rules, requiring 85% local content by 1974 to gain the tax benefits, saw the end of local assembly on 6 November 1972.


The decision was no doubt assisted by the fact that additional space needed to be freed up for the forthcoming P76.

The occasion was marked with a mock funeral for the last car off the line, attended by media and NSW Government Minister John Lloyd Waddy.

Leyland Australia's Sales Director, John Kay, was quoted in that month's Leyland Parts News: "It's a tremendous pity that the B cannot survive. But we have to be hard headed. Regulations require 85 per cent local content after 1972. The present sale potential of specialist cars like the MGB is too low to make production feasible with 85 per cent local content."

An indication that sales had slowed considerably, is that the last of the MGBs was not sold in Australia until well into 1973.

Only MGB roadsters were assembled in Australia. An estimated 600 or so GT models were imported CBU.

In summary, the MGB was produced in two Sydney factories over nearly ten years, with 9,085 assembled (though this figure is disputed in some sources). At its height it held 50% of the Australian sportscar market. A great record in anyone's language. 

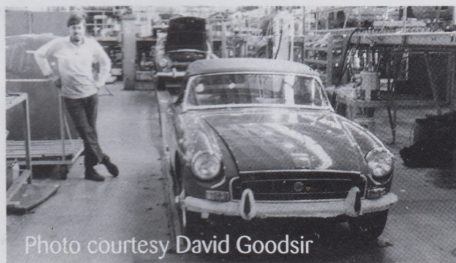
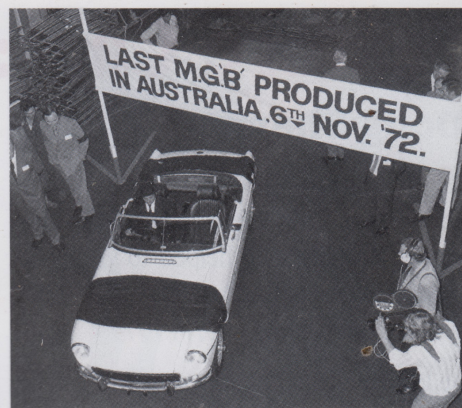


Photo courtesy David Goodsir

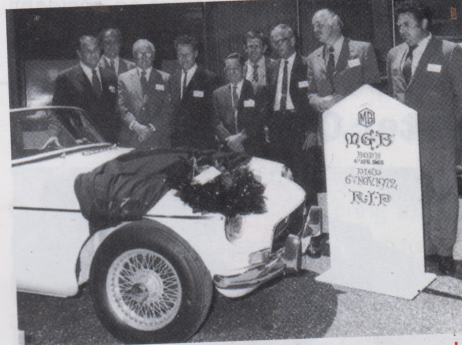
David Goodsir with completed B - c1971.



Mock funeral attracted print, TV and radio media, while staff wore black armbands.



NSW Government Minister, and WW2 fighter ace, John Lloyd Waddy drove the last MGB, with a convoy of classic MGs.



Note MG logo in hexagon, not octagon!

Acknowledgements:

Much of the information for this feature has come from a new website:

www.mgbmadeinaustralia.org

The site is the work of Roger Sharpe, with input from John Lindsay, Tom Aczel and Garry Kemm. This is a work in progress but contains an enormous amount of useful information. Well worth checking out for any enthusiast or restorer.

Other information came from MGB by David Knowles, Spotlight On MG Down Under by Barry Lake, Original MGB by Anders Ditlev Clausager and numerous period magazines.

Additional photographs and info came from John Lindsay, Peter Davis and David Goodsir, former MGB Leading Hand at Waterloo.