

GREEN-MANTLED

by MICHAEL BROWN

The 1¼-litre is balanced, unobtrusive, but stylish in the traditional way. And it is still unmistakably an M.G.

THE 1 ¼ LITRE M.G. AFTER SIX MONTHS' ACQUAINTANCE

OBSERVANT readers (that is to say, no doubt, readers of *The Autocar*) will have noticed that the photographs in a certain series of articles frequently feature a 1¼-litre M.G., which means that the lucky author of that series is accompanied out of town by this admirable product of Abingdon. After six months of companionship I venture with caution, and with the proviso that a similar temperament on the part of the owner is necessary, to suggest that the M.G. is an ideal companion.

As a motorist I lack the virtues of some of my colleagues. Not for me the inclination (or the knowledge) to dissect my car into a super-Meccano set and then to rebuild it. But I like, when it is necessary, to be able to get at the components in need of adjustment and to carry out the work with the tools provided. Not for me, either, the technique of the trials driver or the Alpine Rally entrant; but I like to go fast when occasion demands and to take corners without more than the minimum slackening of speed. As regards styling, I am conservatively inclined, admiring function, proportion and balance, but prepared to sacrifice some of the aesthetic qualities if their presence means a reduction of function.

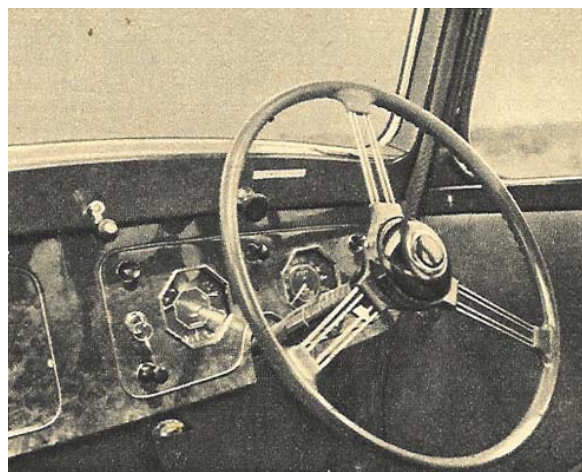
The picture, to the real enthusiast, may be depressing. But he may be cheered by the weakness that I have for a good central gear change, separate front seats, and revs that are not permitted to drop below a comfortable level. In other words, I am completely disinterested in the speed from which a car will pick up on top gear because I enjoy changing down, and I would not dream of letting my 1,250 c.c. pull me away from to m.p.h. on a ratio of 5.1 to 1. No sir; for me, 7.1 or even 10.6 to 1.

As one who was never, in the years 1939-1945, heard to mention rabbits on board ships, I had one misgiving when the M.G. became mine—it was finished in two shades of green, the body light and the wings dark (I nearly called this article Greensleeves). That was bad ju-ju; on the other hand, an ex-pilot of World War I had presented me (in 1939) with a St. Christopher which I always carry. That is good ju-ju, and the ratio of good to bad is obviously high. I forgot the two shades of green in a very short time. Right now I like them.

The M.G. is a driver's car. He settles into the seat, adjusts the steering wheel to his liking, and casts an appreciative eye at the black and white dials in the "Künber octagons" on the polished instrument panel. He notes

that there is an ammeter, an oil pressure gauge, but no thermometer; satisfactory if not ideal. He notes that the switches are plain black knobs, and he blesses Abingdon, for the observation confirms that there is not a single distracting highlight on the facia, a fact which is also evident when the instruments are illuminated. In carping mood, he might complain that the traffic signals, operated by a knurled ring on the steering wheel boss, are returned a little too soon, but they can always be operated a second time. Of the steering wheel itself he can hardly speak too highly, for it is just right. So, too, is the steering, under all but conditions of high stress. It is light, positive, and has adequate castor action. Under real stress—when taking a corner fast—there is a slight tendency to oversteer as the i.f.s. takes its maximum load on the outside front wheel. One is not caught out by this, because such speeds are approached gradually, by an intelligent driver,

Polished wood, setting off good instruments and a thin, spring-spoked steering wheel, adjustable telescopically, give the M.G. driver the slight feeling of luxury.





Clean fronts are not necessarily all-enclosed. There is little that is superfluous about this sports saloon aspect.

GREEN-MANTLED: *continued*

and awareness of the tendency becomes instinctive, as does counteraction. The driver who is unaware of the capabilities of i.f.s. in fast cornering would never become conscious of it.

The gear change gives me joy. I have a foolish liking for positive mechanical action. Double-pole, spring-loaded electric switches, made to carry currents of 50 amps or so, make me feel like a small boy in the cabin of the Royal Scot — if a volunteer is wanted to operate them I'm your man. Consequently the neat snick-snick of the M.G. gear lever, with not an atom of lost motion this side of the cogs, gives me the curious, sensory pleasure that belongs to such things. The cogs themselves suit my driving needs, for I have never had the feeling that such and such a ratio could do with being a bit higher or lower. A whisper of engine will move the car away from standstill, and the synchromesh is good. Just occasionally I let in the clutch and find that reverse is not properly engaged, but this is a good fault. The casual engagement of reverse is not to be recommended.

The brakes—Lockheed hydraulic—are first-class, and the hand brake (mechanical on the rear wheels) is an example of what a hand brake should be. A rigid central lever takes all the driver cares to give it, and the naked compensatory adjustment at its base gives a glimpse of cables that inspire confidence. This is still a Brake, not just a brake.

The Happy Motorist

With all this, one can understand the M.G. driver being a happy man, and that is important, -for it means that, free from agitation, half-conscious misgivings, and awkwardness of manipulation, he can concentrate on the job of driving. When his attention leaves the interior as he moves off from standstill he is given additional backing. Over the bonnet is an honest side lamp, with ruby glass on top, plainly visible to mark his left side wing. The angular front, at a certain distance from the eye, drops precipitously to the road, and the positiveness of this point is, I find, of great assistance in judgment of distances. There is no such positiveness about the curving front, and the vanishing point is a matter of guesswork.

Now this ever-visible dimension is a constant for the eye of the driver, and I believe that the eye subconsciously uses it as a measuring rod for greater distances. Take it away and the eye is left in the position of the man at one side of the valley scanning the hills opposite over a sea of mist. How far off? His answer may be five miss out.

In close quarters the effect is even more beneficial. Small size overall, in conjunction with such visibility, enables the M.G. to be inserted into confined spaces with confidence. In traffic it can take gaps which other cars must shy at. When two vehicles appear abreast, coming in the opposite direction, you can assist the overtaker (even if you disapprove of his methods) by planting the left-side wheel three inches from the verge and staying there. Around the 1¼-litre a cosy enclosure of confidence is built by these attributes, and after a few thousand miles with it the driver is -fearful only that some other vehicle will commit the foolish error that results in a scratched wing.

I find the it-litre a happy car when it is cruising at any speed up to 60 m.p.h. Normally I do not like to see its needle above 60, but on occasion circumstances have caused me to touch 70

m.p.h. At that speed its quite small engine becomes noticeable, and a transmission hum is evident on my particular model. None the less there is no sensation of stress, nor fear that "something might fly off." From long record and racing experience, M.G. engines have been given the ability to attain high revs, and to keep them- going without protest. After prolonged spells at high speed, the 1¼ engine seems even more keyed up to the job than when it started, and, curiously enough, it frequently forgets to run on after such a burst, although it may do so after a quarter-mile from the filling station at 20 m.p.h. The phenomenon is easily stopped by opening the throttle wide immediately after switching off. One thing that puzzles me is the quick drop of water in the header tank. I believe it is spillage, and having gone down to finger-lip the level will go no farther; but as I like unscrewing the heavy plated cap and balancing it in my hand (I reckon nothing of the h.p. which goes on such vanity) I have not let matters go far enough to be positive.

If I am to utilize figures for an argument I have to force myself to extract the slide rule from its case. Consequently I haven't a clue as to averages on the M.G. Believe it or not, I do not know the exact mileage from my home to the offices of this journal. All I can say is that I have several times driven myself into a corner with regard to time, but that the 11-litre has invariably got me out of it. Petrol consumption is in the region of 30 m.p.g. and oil consumption virtually nil (10,000 miles). Likewise it has reliably started, with minimum use of the choke; indeed, it is easily possible to over-choke. At night, the lights live well up to the speed, and in the half-light I bless the ruby glasses to the side lamps. When they are on the whole world, and the driver, know it.

I would not change a thing on the car, although some would like a larger luggage locker. Hobo-minded, I tend to travel—as does my regular passenger—with a toothbrush and pyjamas, so we do not mind the comparatively small space; in any case, the back seat is normally unoccupied. Being human, I am a snob at heart. Small boys do not say, "Coo, etc., etc.," but the more knowing ones have been known to point out to their fellows that that is an M.G., and the wealth of emphasis behind the initials shows that they are *au fait* on their Goldie Gardner. I was immensely flattered the other morning when a near neighbour, an R.A.F. three-ringer with a plentiful plastering of fruit salad, made a complete circuit of the car as it stood outside my gate, one eyebrow cocked appreciatively. - Very flattering.

"The angular front, at a certain distance from the eye, drops precipitously to the road," a help in judging distances, says the author.



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Additional to the above article, this extract was sent into the Correspondence section of the Autocar in response to the above article.

GREEN-MANTLED”

Further Tribute to the “1 ¼”

[62879] – As an extremely satisfied owner of a 1 ¼ litre M.G. saloon since last November I read, with interest, the article by Michael Brown (August 4). May I say how much I agree with all he said? But I should like to record one or two further points of appreciation of this grand little car.

Since taking delivery of my “1 ¼,” the fifth MG. I have had the good fortune to own, I have driven it pretty hard for 10,000 miles without the faintest sign of trouble. It has yet to have the head off, and this is not set really necessary since there are few signs of requiring a “de-coke”. Not a bad effort for a high efficiency engine of this type.

I have checked most carefully and found that I have been getting a petrol consumption of 34 m.p.g. under all conditions, including warming up in the morning, “hack” work when shopping, and fast cruising at 55-60 m.p.h. This consumption may be dropping slightly now that I have done over 10,000 miles.

In a recent journey to Cornwall of over 200 miles I had no difficulty in averaging 33 m.p.g. with complete safety and comfort with three adults and two children inside, six large suitcases on top and two more suitcases, a folding pram and a cot on the back!

I should like to end by saying that the major attraction of this little motor car is not so much in its maximum speed or acceleration as in its excellent steering and road holding capabilities which, I venture to say, are unequalled by any other car of a comparable size and price.

Finally, I should be interested to get in touch with the owner of a J2 Model MG. Midget, registered number JB 2302, should he read this, since I saw him in the distance recently but was unable to tell him that he was driving an MG. which I sold sixteen sears ago!

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