

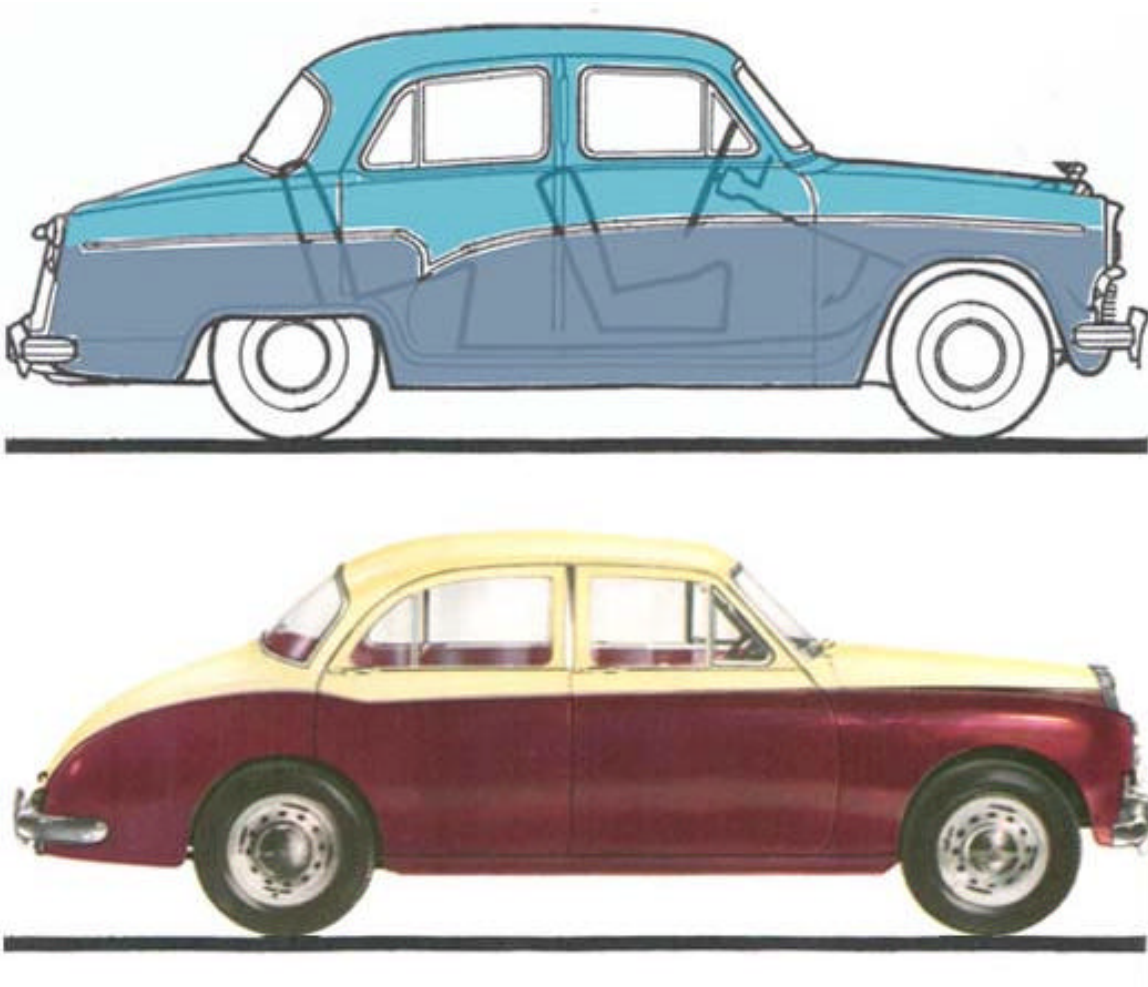
## **Market Forces, Timing and Critical Mass dictated converging paths for MG, Wolseley, Riley, Morris and Austin.**

### **Featuring**

Selectively featured for the period 1952 to 1958 are: Austin Cambridge A50 & A55, MG Magnette ZA & ZB and Wolseley 4/44 & 15/50.

### **Marketing - One BMC Company and some of its marques.**

Comparing two marques **{Picture 1}** at the end of an era, such as the 1958 MG Magnette ZB Varitone and 1958 Austin Cambridge A55 series 1 had never occurred to me until recently. Viewed side-by-side it belatedly seems there is a lot to appreciate in the way these and other related products fared under the new BMC. It begs a look back in history to see the convergence.



*Picture 1 MG Magnette ZB Varitone and Austin Cambridge A55 side view.*

## Production Volumes – 1952 to 1958

Only the Austin received new external body pressings during its production run. Wolseley and MG retained the same external pressings. To see why look at the volumes produced.

Total **Austin** A50 & A55 Cambridge = [114,867+154,000]=**268,867**  
Total **Wolseley** 4/44 & 15/50 = [29,845+12,353] = **42,198**  
Total **MG** ZA & ZB Magnette = [18,076+18,525] = **36,601**

## Important Dates

**1949 to 1951** Nuffield commissioned Gerald Palmer to redesign MG/Riley/Wolseley for commonality. Riley to be produced in larger body only.

**1952** Nuffield and Austin merged as BMC. Austin products to now take precedence.

**1952** Wolseley 4/44 is the only car launched as commissioned by Nuffield. The Wolseley XPAW engine retained until 1956, at which time all three marques are updated.

**1953** MG Magnette ZA released with BMC [Austin] engine and transmission.

**1954** Austin A50 Cambridge launched with well-placed timing to capture changes.

**1955** MG Magnette ZA hybrid flashers replacing semaphore trafficators on some exports.

**1956** Wolseley 4/44 engineered to take BMC engine and transmission. Launched as Wolseley 15/50 with no panel changes.

**1956** MG Magnette upgraded to ZB specification to include Standard and Varitone form.

**1956** Austin A50 Cambridge updated as the A55 Cambridge with new trim, rear panel changes and large curved rear window.

**1957** Manumatic option fully available to Austin A55 Cambridge, Wolseley 15/50 and MG Magnette ZB.

**1958** BMC cease production of MG Magnette ZB, Wolseley 15/50 and Austin A55 Cambridge prior to release of new Farina body range.

## Marque{ing} a Line in the Sands of Time

**Wolseley 4/44** 1952 - 1956. [Production Run = 29,845]

Four door saloon [{Picture 2}](#) offering more quality and appeal than more ordinary family based cars, while retaining a more conservative look associated with a desirable product. Standard features being: Column gear change/Fog light/Twin Horns/Heater demister/windscreen washers/clock /Rack and pinion steering/ Veneered & timber dashboard and door capping. Second fog light was optional.

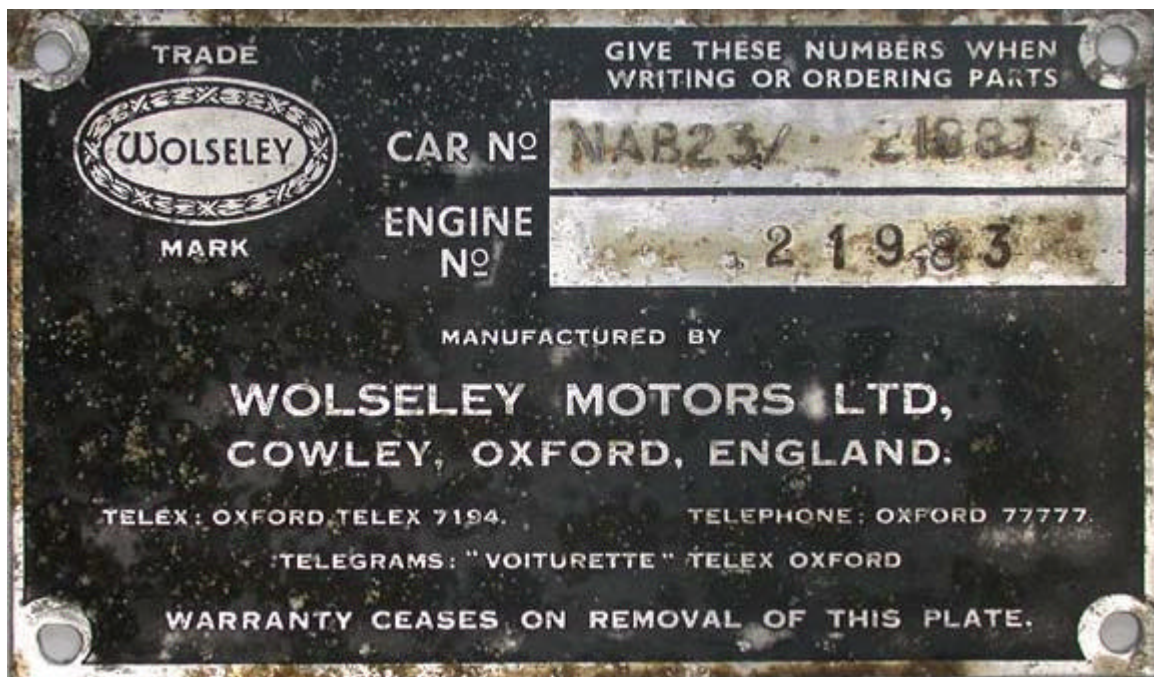
**Wolseley 15/50** 1956 – 1958. [Production Run = 12,353]

4/44 was updated and released in 1956 as the 15/50 with standardized BMC 1500cc ‘B’ series engine, gearbox and eventually a BMC ‘banjo’ differential as used in Austin and MG models.

Retaining the same body panels as the 4/44 the Wolseley 15/50 is distinguished by a floor gear change and external chrome trim.



*Picture 2a Wolseley 4/44 saloon*



*Picture 2b Wolseley 4/44 Chassis Plate*

**MG Midgette ZA** 1953 – 1956. [Production Run = 18,076]

Four-door saloon **{Picture 3}** aimed at purchasers looking for more luxury and sporting pretensions that family based cars did not provide. Standard features being: Twin carburettors/Fog lights/Twin Horns/Heater demister/Windscreen washers/Clock /Rack and pinion steering/ Veneered Door capping and after a delay a full wood & veneer dashboard.



*Picture 3a MG Midgette ZA saloon*



*Picture 3b MG Midgette ZA Chassis Plate*

**MG Midget ZB** 1956 – 1958. [Production Run = 18,525]

Retaining the same body shell and features of the ZA, but appeared in either a:

- Standard form. [Production Run = 10,722] with minor changes to external body chrome/interior trim/dashboard/engine power. Options included: trafficators or hybrid flashers and Manumatic transmission.
- Varitone option. [Production Run = 7,803] standard form with added: Hybrid flashers, large rear window, chrome trim that emphasized the roofline, waist, and colour divide for duo tone [varitone] body colours.

**Austin Cambridge A50.** 1954 – 1956 [Production Run=114,867]

Four-door sedan {Picture 4} aimed at the family market where a good reliable no frills vehicle was required. The same/similar 1489cc engine, gearbox and differential as the MG ZA Midget; although the Austin delivered its power under the control of a column shift that further maximized front passenger carrying capacity. Either trafficators or flashing indicators were provided as standard.

Additionally options could be added. One nice option was overdrive that could be added to improve cruising and fuel economy {MG ZA Midget was not designed to allow for this option}, and Manumatic was beginning to become available towards the end of the A50's production run.



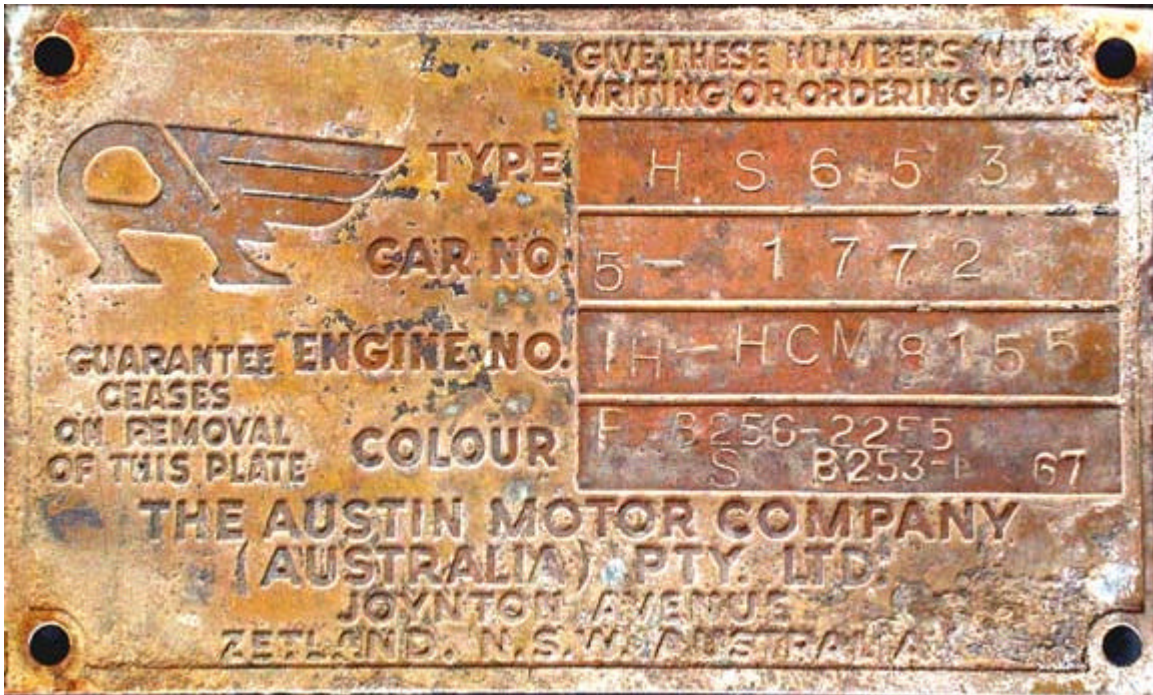
Picture 4a Austin Cambridge A55 Sedan

**Austin Cambridge A55.** 1956 – 1958 [Production Run=154,000]

Body now four inches longer, incorporates an upgrade in the rear portion with larger boot and large curved rear window {slightly narrower than the ZB Varitone}. Chrome trim

curves down both sides to define the colour divide {below the waistline} for two-tone colour schemes. While semaphore signaling is discontinued in favour of flashing indicators mounted in dedicated housings.

Mechanically the A50 and A55 are identical and transmission options of either Overdrive or semi- automatic ‘Manumatic’ {Picture 5} could be chosen.



*Picture 4b Austin Cambridge A55 brass Chassis and Trim Plates*

## Conclusion.

**The preceding information and conclusion encapsulate the story of three well-known marques that followed convergent paths under BMC. In conclusion,** the world at the end of the late 1940's was beginning to change with export markets and customer expectations requiring UK vehicle manufacturers to be more competitive in cost and product appeal. To this end amalgamation in 1952 of Nuffield and Austin as BMC would cut costs although timing would determine which models could initially benefit. Rationalization of Nuffield marques by Gerald Palmer would now be delayed as streamlining inside the new BMC organization set new criteria; in fact of the updated designs due for release in 1952 only the Wolseley 4/44 was released complete with a traditional Nuffield 1250 cc XPAW engine. A major criterion being Austin A, B & C series engines would propel the next generation of MG, Riley and Wolseley.

Hence the MG ZA Magnette was delayed into 1953 to accept the newer 1500 cc B Series engine, gearbox and differential. Additionally both Wolseley 4/44 and MG Magnette ZA had gestated to a point where developed body design would render it difficult or {economically} impractical to provide this generation with overdrive, flashing indicators, dual colour treatments, panel upgrades and large rear windows.

On the bright side Austin [now BMC] would retire such cars as the A40 Somerset {Picture 6} and A70 Hereford in time to catch the changes and absorbed them into the design and 1954 launch of the Austin A50 Cambridge; i.e. the model had semaphore or flashing indicators, overdrive provision and improved B series engine. Additionally the Austin A55 had the critical mass [numbers] to receive a fully tooled large rear window, along with rear panel upgrades and two-tone paint treatments with chrome demarcation/styling.



*Picture 5 Manumatic Boot Badge*

**Warped Wisdom** *Timing, evolution and the ability to successfully exploit your environment invariably defines the fittest to survive, then again miss out on some of the evolution and you can still be a happy platypus.*

### References and Further Reading

Sales Brochures – Wolseley 4/44, MG Midget {ZA & ZB} & Austin A40 Somerset  
British Cars of the Late Fifties- 1955 to 1959. Olyslager Auto Library, F Warne & Co Ltd  
Magazine. Practical Classics. Oct 1990. Vol2; No6. {Article - Worthwhile Wolseley}  
Austin A50 & A55 Cambridge Profile <http://www.motorbase.com/vehicle/2/8/4/>  
Workshop Manual Cambridge A40/A50/A55 – AKD 1012A  
MG Saloon cars – Anders Ditlev Clausager  
Labels & Badges –Internet site –Under ‘Hints & Tips’ – [www.magnette.org](http://www.magnette.org)  
DB10 Flasher Relay –Under ‘Hints & Tips’ – [www.magnette.org](http://www.magnette.org)

By Laurence {Loz} Scott 28 June 2004

### Attachment- Last available in 1954



*Picture 6 Austin A40 Somerset Sedan*

END