

ZA/ZB Magnette



The MG ZA Magnette was launched in 1953 with the new 1498cc B-series engine. Output was a modest 60bhp at 4600rpm, but power was increased to 68bhp for the ZB, which demonstrated its sporting capabilities through a successful competition career. Now, they're easy to maintain and upgrade but costs can be high.

Engine

The MG ZA Magnette shared the 1498cc B-series unit with its BMC brethren Austin Cambridge A40 rather than the overhead-valve 1250cc seen on the similar Palmer-designed Wolseley, indicating that, despite the British Motor Corporation's economies of scale brought about by the advent of badge engineering, the MG version was always destined to become a more sporting derivative as befitted the revered Octagon.

Power was boosted from the initial (60bhp to a sprightlier 68bhp at 5200rpm for the ZB via a new cylinder head with modified valve ports and increased compression ratio. Larger SU H4 carbs were also introduced, along with a modified throttle coupling.

Use of the evergreen B-series which, in its later form it shared with the MGA 1500, has meant the Z Magnette is well placed to take advantage of a whole host of modifications and improvements which abound for Abingdon's popular sports cars, especially the MGB. For those looking for livelier performance, upgrading to an 1800cc unit is a natural and relatively straightforward procedure that will bring not only benefits in increased power and torque, but also day-to-day ease of use.

Opting for the five-bearing engine introduced on the MGB from October 1964 opens up even more possibilities, with overdrive well suited to the regal Magnette.

Other related engine upgrades to consider include fitting an oil cooler and upgrading the oil pump. Similarly carburettors can be upgraded, while fitting a K&N air filter makes for easier maintenance.

Gearbox and Back Axle

The three-synchro gearbox is generally durable, although the car did develop a reputation for jumping out of gear (stripping the box and replacing the rear bronze thrust washer with heavier gauge appears to help! and a lack of synchromesh on first can also appear alien to motorists brought up on modern saloons. By far the biggest benefit open to Magnette owners looking to upgrade the power and drive-ability of their cars is to fit a five-speed conversion in tandem with an 1800cc engine upgrade. Both Ford Sierra and Datsun 280Z boxes are available through specialists, the Sierra unit tending to find favour in the UK with the 280Z a preferred choice with enthusiasts in the US.

The ZB Magnette brought a change in axle ratios, which made for quieter high-speed cruising.

Suspension and Steering;

Both suspension and steering components are robust in construction and simple to maintain. The ZA Magnette axle was suspended by semi-elliptic, multiple-leaf springs with rubber pads sandwiched within

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the central locating hacket and rubber bushes in the eyes and top shackle bearings. Replacement bushes are easily obtained and fitted. Front suspension is independent with upper and lower wishbones, coil springs and telescopic dampers. One potential problem concerns the rear-facing tic-bars, and an eye should be kept on these to ensure they do not wear too thin prior to replacement. Z Magnette specialists NTG Services can provide hand-worked exchange units for £65.49, but these can be fiddly to replace.

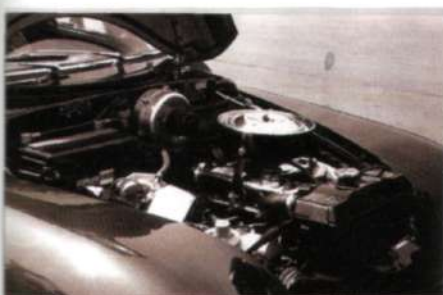
Steering is rack and pinion with a damping rubber-mounted coupling connecting the pinion with the offset column. The improvements made to the ZB Magnette introduced in 1956 saw the steering rack assembly given rubber bushes at its sub-frame mounting points and, later, a modified 'anti-rattle' rack assembly was introduced. Steering on a well-sorted car should be both light and precise.

Brakes

The ZA Magnette featured all-round



'RE-COMMISSIONING A CAR CAN COST MORE THAN THE VEHICLE'S VALUE. BUT ONCE YOU COMMIT, THEN THE Z MAGNETTE OFFERS GREAT FAMILY MG MOTORING-



Lockheed hydraulically-operated 10in drums with brake and clutch pedals sharing a twin-bore master cylinder. The set up was retained throughout the car's production life and is therefore ripe for improvement to compliment other upgrades. By far the most popular and accessible modification is a front wheel disc brake conversion. Using MGA 1600 hubs along with an adapter plate for MGB calipers, this aids braking ability and sits well alongside other MGB performance upgrades. Always ensure any work is undertaken by a competent mechanic or specialist garage.

Body and Fittings

Designed by Gerald Palmer, the elegant Z Magnette was a departure for MG in that it became the marque's first all monocoque car and, coincidentally, the last MG saloon to be built at its Abingdon factory. The attractive outline was shared with Wolseley derivatives so beloved by police forces, but the MG variant retained an independence which still identified the saloon as an MG.

Although the Magnette may have been technologically ground-breaking for the 1950s, both quality of materials and age have meant the ensuing years will have taken their toll. Areas most likely to have faced corrosion problems such as inner and outer sills, inner wing box sections and the floor area are all available as replacement

panels, but Mike Green of NTG Services advises any would be buyers to ensure that any car they may be contemplating does not have damage to the large compound curved panels, while die front wings should at least be repairable as these are no longer available as new replacement panels. Similarly bright-work - especially bumpers - should be able to be re-chromed, although some smaller chrome items are available off die shelf.

Interior

The Z Magnette interior is certainly lavish by modern standards with ample room for four large adults in die luxurious leather seats. Again the onset of age is the bug-bear and, unless die car has been cherished, then worn, ripped and faded hide can be expensive to replace with new seat covers costing £705 for either a pair of front seats or a rear set. Carpet sets are more modestly-priced at £176 while interior door panels come in at £352.

The wooden dash can be refurbished, as many examples will have tarnished or the veneer cracked and specialists more usually associated with pre-war cars are available to undertake die work. Other interior items such as headlining and upholstery can be farmed out to general trimmers, but anyone looking to run a Z Magnette should think carefully about die depth they wish to go in re-commissioning a car as a seemingly

At a glance

1953- 1956

All monocoque Palmer-designed ZA Magnette replaced ageing MG Y-type saloon, bringing modern construction methods and parts sharing to Abingdon's production line. Powered by 1498cc B Series engine, performance was adequate for such a heavy sporting saloon.

1956- 1958

New model introduced alongside MGA 1500 with which it shared a more powerful engine. Also featured larger wrap-around rear screen and became available in attractive Varitone colour scheme. Considered the most desirable of this underestimated 1950s saloon.

Thanks to...

Mike Green at NTG Services. Call 01473 406031 to order the company's specialist Z Magnette catalogue and for helpful advice on conversion options.

Also see the MG Car Club's Z Magnette & Farina Register at www.magnette.org or contact the club on 01325 555552.

simple refurbishment could easily cost more than the vehicle's value.

But once you've decided to commit, then the Z Magnette offers great family MG motoring the car's inherent strength and simplicity of design and maintenance coupled with performance upgrades makes for a classic saloon deserving of being considered for everyday use.