



Magnett ic Attracti ons

A few sensible mods can really help MG's sporting saloons live up to their image, as Russ Smith discovers

ALWAYS highly regarded, the MG Magnette somehow rises above its BMC badge

engineered origins. Despite a bodyshell shared with Wolseley's 4/44 and 15/50 and a 1489cc B-series engine shared with everything bar BMC boss Leonard Lord's lawn mower, Autosport thought the ZB Magnette 'the best of the BMC range' in 1958. That still leaves room for improvement, and it's not difficult to adapt parts from other related vehicles to make a very enjoyable machine like the car depicted here.

In choosing a car for modification, there is for once little to be gained by going for the later model. Differences between the ZA and ZB were minor, in the main involving trim and an extra 8bhp from raised compression and cylinder head modifications. The only exception might be preference for improved visibility through the larger rear window offered on the range-topping ZB Varitone models.

ENGINE

THERE'S little to be gained from the effort of modifying the original engine, nor does the later 1622cc B-series offer much extra power. Best choice is the ultimate 1798cc B-series used in the MGB and Marina TC, among others. With 95-98bhp in standard form this offers a good 40 percent more power than the ZB.

The early, three-bearing MGB engine, used from 1962-65, is more closely related to the Magnette's and is therefore an easier swap. The sump well on a Magnette is at the opposite end to that on an MGB, but sump and oil pick-ups can be swapped from one to the other on these early engines. Unfortunately, early MGB engines are hard to come by now, so you will most likely have to adapt the later, stronger five-bearing version.

First task is to cut the mounting flange from both sumps. Weld the MGB flange to the ZA/ZB sump to allow for the different bolt patterns (above).

The Magnette's oil pick-up also needs welding to the MGB oil pump pipe, with a new support bracket added, as shown in the accompanying photo (left).

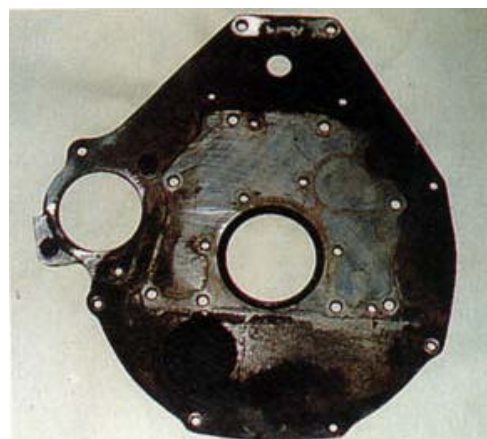


Another major change is to rotate the starter motor by about 60 degrees so the solenoid misses the steering column. This involves drilling a new top hole, adding a lug to the engine backplate to take a new lower bolt hole (right).

Final change is to move the dipstick tube, plugging the old hole and drilling a new one in the matching cast lug nearer the front of the engine.

To maintain an original look you can retain the Magnette's carburetors and air intake system, substituting the MGB's carb needles.

John Davies chose the less restrictive MGA cast iron exhaust manifold for his car and had a bigger bore system made up to match by Stainless Exhaust



Specialist.

COOLING

WITH a bit of help, a good original radiator is up to the job. John Davies added a six-bladed MGA fan (available for £27.32 from Moss Darlington) and an oil cooler mounted ahead of the radiator. A further improvement can be had by fitting an MGB overflow tank and a 15psi radiator cap.

TRANSMISSION



BEST choice is the post-1967 all-synchro MGB gearbox with the optional overdrive. Use of the latter means the ZB's 4.55:1 rear axle ratio can remain unchanged, though it would be beneficial to change the 4.875:1 ratio if you have a ZA model. The MGB's gearbox mounting cross-member is easily adapted to fit the Magnette, but you will need to cut the top off the gearbox tunnel to clear the taller casing and remote.



Construct a new tunnel top from sheet steel. The Magnette's lever surround can be replaced three to four inches further back, where the lever now protrudes, close to, but not fouling the handbrake. By happy coincidence, in this position it falls perfectly to hand.

It is also possible to have the overdrive uprated, as John Davies has done. A stronger spring pressure and shorter travel makes for instant engagement. The work was carried out, along with a full rebuild of the unit, by specialist Lawrence Winter.

Completing the drivetrain, the Magnette propshaft was shortened and fitted with an MGB front joint.

BRAKES

DESPITE all that is said about drum brakes, the ten-inch diameter ones on a Magnette are actually pretty good. Fitting a remote servo makes them even more confidence inspiring. The unit commonly used on Hillman Hunters and still widely available is favourite and fits nicely on the offside inner wing.

For more stopping power, NTG Motor Services can supply a disc brake conversion. This utilises MGA 1600 discs, but the rest is sourced elsewhere or specially made. That accounts for the £600-£700 a complete kit will cost.



SUSPENSION

AGAIN, the standard set-up is pretty good. Unusually it is also unique to these cars (along with the similar Wolseleys) and not from the BMC parts bin. Some benefit can be had, however, from a full set of Spax Adjustable Gas dampers. These are still listed for both front and rear at £64.63 each. Try MG specialists or Spax.

NTG do have a pattern for a front anti-roll bar but so far have not had enough interest to warrant producing any. Contact them for further details.

WHEELS/TYRES

NOTHING drastic needed here, just ditch the original 5.50 x 15 in crossplies. 165 x 15 radials will fit comfortably on the standard rims and provide plenty of grip without altering the look of the car.

If you do want to dress the car up a little, how about a set of wire wheels which are easily fitted using parts from other MGs?

ELECTRICS

USE OF an MGB alternator will provide more oomph to power halogen headlamps - a great improvement over the standard lights. It also means that the separate voltage regulator can be discarded. Converting to negative earth at the same time means swapping over the connections on the fuel pump, ammeter and clock, which are the only polarity sensitive items.

The other recommended change is for safety reasons. John Davies has disconnected the semaphores, which seem invisible to most drivers today, and fitted separate rear indicators on pods built up to match those that the tail lights sit on.

