



MG MIDGET GT

BMC plays more performance games with a possible, even probable eye on future production.

BY JOHN BLUNSDEN

ALTHOUGH THERE IS NO SIGN of the MG Car Company revoking its decision not to directly support motor racing, there has at least been a move in the right direction this year. Dick Jacobs, until his Le Mans accident in 1955 a works MG driver, and since then an entrant of Abingdon-built cars in his own right, is fielding a team of factory built and owned Grand Touring MG Midgets in a number of British events. At present his racing program is a modest one, for 1962 is being used as a trial period for the new cars, with the prospect of more interesting things to come.

The story of the GT Midgets really starts well over a year ago, when Jacobs was looking for a car to replace his team of MGA Twin-cams which he had recently sold after two quite successful years on the circuits. The Midget seemed the logical answer, so, armed with a few ideas on how to improve the production model, he went to talk to John Thornley ("Mr. MG") and Sid Enever, the company's engine expert.

Both men were receptive to Jacobs' suggestions, but rather than modify existing production cars, and possibly run into homologation problems, they said they would prefer the factory to build a team of special cars incorporating Jacobs' ideas. These would remain the property of the works, but would be loaned to Jacobs, who would look after

their maintenance and racing program, from his garage at Woodford, Essex — about 20 miles east of London. (It may come as no surprise to hear that Dick holds a thriving MG dealership!)

Three cars have been built, two to race and the third to be held as a spare. The drivers are Alan Foster (who was in the MGA Twin-cam team) and Andrew Hedges — a successful saloon-car driver. The cars' competition debut was on Whit Monday, when Foster managed to mix it with some Lotus 23s for a couple of laps of Goodwood before power inevitably told, while his lap time of 1 minute 42 seconds was only about 9 second outside last year's Formula Junior record for the Sussex circuit.

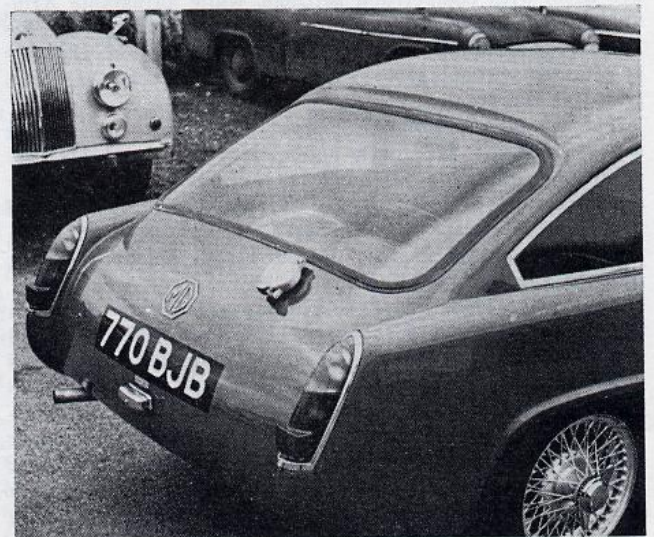
This was a remarkable achievement for a car which is so close to standard as to be scarcely believable. Indeed, these GT babies could be cited as excellent examples of how to achieve so much with so little.

Even the bodywork is basically standard. The attractive shape has been obtained by taking the production shell and fitting to it an elongated nose section (at Thornley's suggestion, John being a great believer in maximum possible air penetration) and adding an extended version of the optional production hardtop. The normal hardtop has been used as a mould from the top of the screen to well behind the trailing edge of the doors, and a "fast back" section, to Jacobs' specification, has been blended into it. There is a slight lip just above the top of the rear screen, and this is the meeting point of the "old" and the "new". The front screen has also been given more rake.

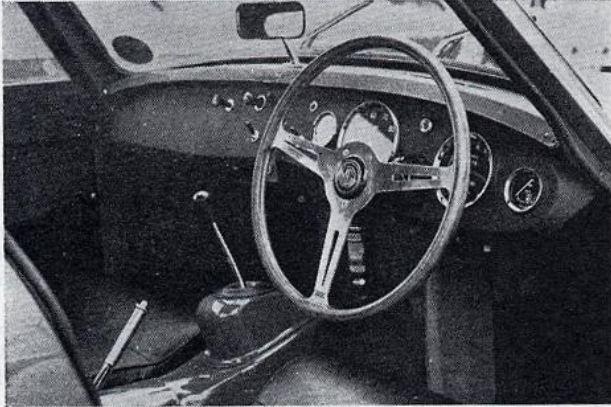
If Dick Jacobs warrants any criticism as a race entrant it is that he is over-cautious in his approach to FIA regulations. He always errs on the safe side, and this fact, combined with the immaculate condition in which he maintains and presents his cars, probably explains why he causes less drama than most other entrants at pre-race scrutineering. It also explains the unsensational mechanical specification of his new team cars.

Contrary to many reports following their first appearance, the GT Midgets were not equipped with highly-tuned Formula Junior 1,100 cc engines, or even 997s; they had the normal BMC 'A' series 948 cc block, bored out to the maximum permissible 40 thou, which gives 979 cc.

Apart from the cylinder dimensions, I suppose you could say that the power unit is modified to Formula Junior standard, although the power and torque curves suggest that the timing is not as extreme as it could be.



Very clean in rear treatment, the steel-bodied coupe has no trunk lid. General construction and detail finish make for suspicions about production; a bit too neat for prototypes.



The interior is stark, typically GT, but a lot cleaner than the Sebring Sprite tested in our Sept. issue. Note 8000 tach.

The very effective dual-choke Weber carburetor is mounted on a special manifold, and of course is used without air filters, while the four-branch exhaust blends into a standard silencer. Naturally, the combustion chambers and porting have been attended to, but here again the modifications are not as radical as on some tuned BMC 'A' series engines. No power figures have been issued for the Midget engines, but at a guess I would put the peak output at no more than 80 horsepower.

One modest concession to high performance is a close-ratio gearbox, but the standard 4.875 to 1 axle is used. The Borg and Beck clutch is also basically standard, but with the usual competition center plate. Lockheed disc brakes are fitted at the front, and normal drums at the rear — a set-up which is already marketed widely for the Sebring Sprites, as indeed are the wire wheels. Ironically, these items have produced more homologation problems than any other part of the car — it seems that although they had been cleared for the Sprite, the necessary paper work had not been completed in respect to the MG Midget. This was hastily rectified!

There are just a few minor suspension alterations, including higher rate coil springs and an anti-sway bar at the front. The standard Armstrong front shock absorbers are used, with competition settings, while adjustable Armstrongs are fitted at the back in conjunction with the normal quarter-elliptic springs. The production radiator is retained without cooling fan, but an oil cooler has been added at the front.

The combination of the longer nose, the more sloping screen, and the fast back has greatly improved air-flow according to tests in the wind tunnel, and this is obviously an important contribution to the car's greatly improved performance. Even better penetration should result when the headlamps are recessed behind plastic shields blending into the general body line.

The side screens are fixed permanently to the doors on the racing Midgets, although they incorporate the usual sliding panels. The interior is devoid of unnecessary trimming, the only luxury being the occasional piece of sorbo padding to protect the drivers' legs. But even so, there is none of the cannibalized look that we find in so many competition versions of production cars, while the interior finish is almost as good as the outside. The first two cars have been finished in a tasteful shade of mid-green, while the third car is painted blue.

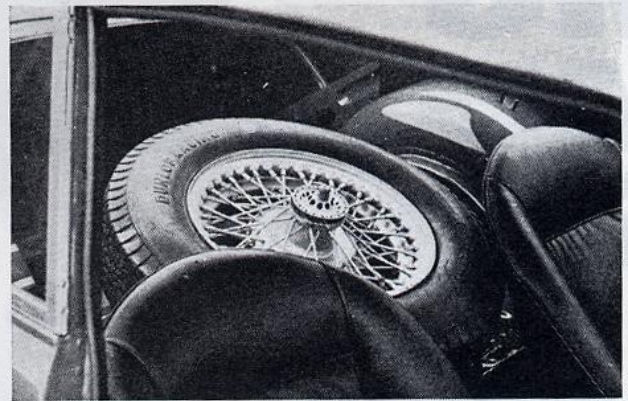
Even utilizing such a high proportion of normal production parts, the construction of the team cars has quite a costly project. It is obviously being looked upon as a

long-term venture, with some of the most significant developments taking place in that immaculate engine compartment. The 997 cc Formula Junior engine has been built in sufficient quantity to cause no homologation problems, but the real sting of the GT Midgets will be felt when they carry the 1,100 cc unit, with the eight-port head — a development which is imminent. Then they should really fly, and what delectable little GT cars they will be!

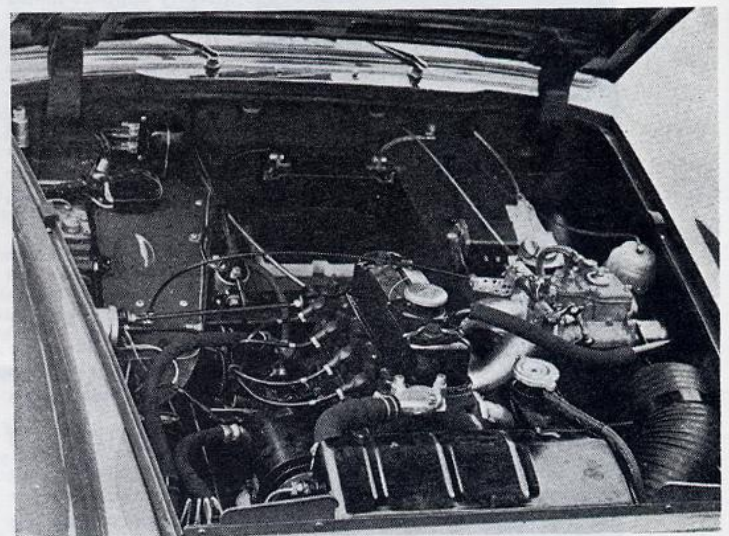
A lot of people have been asking the inevitable question: "When will a production version be announced?" The quick answer to that one is "Who knows — maybe never!" At present this is strictly a competition endeavor, but those optimists who are hoping to buy a replica from a dealer's showroom may be heartened by the thought that the MGA appeared first of all as a racing prototype. But in case they get too excited, they might also remember that the gap between the first prototype and the production version was several years!

Nevertheless, enthusiasts Jacobs, Thornley and Enever have shown us that there is quite a lot of scope for development in that innocent little sports car that goes under the name MG Midget.

Anyone interested in following it up?



Spare tire and large gas tank occupy the majority of space in the aft section. Visibility is good through large rear window.



One-liter engine is probably the same as that in the Sebring Sprite, output near 80 hp. Note Weber, four-branch exhaust.