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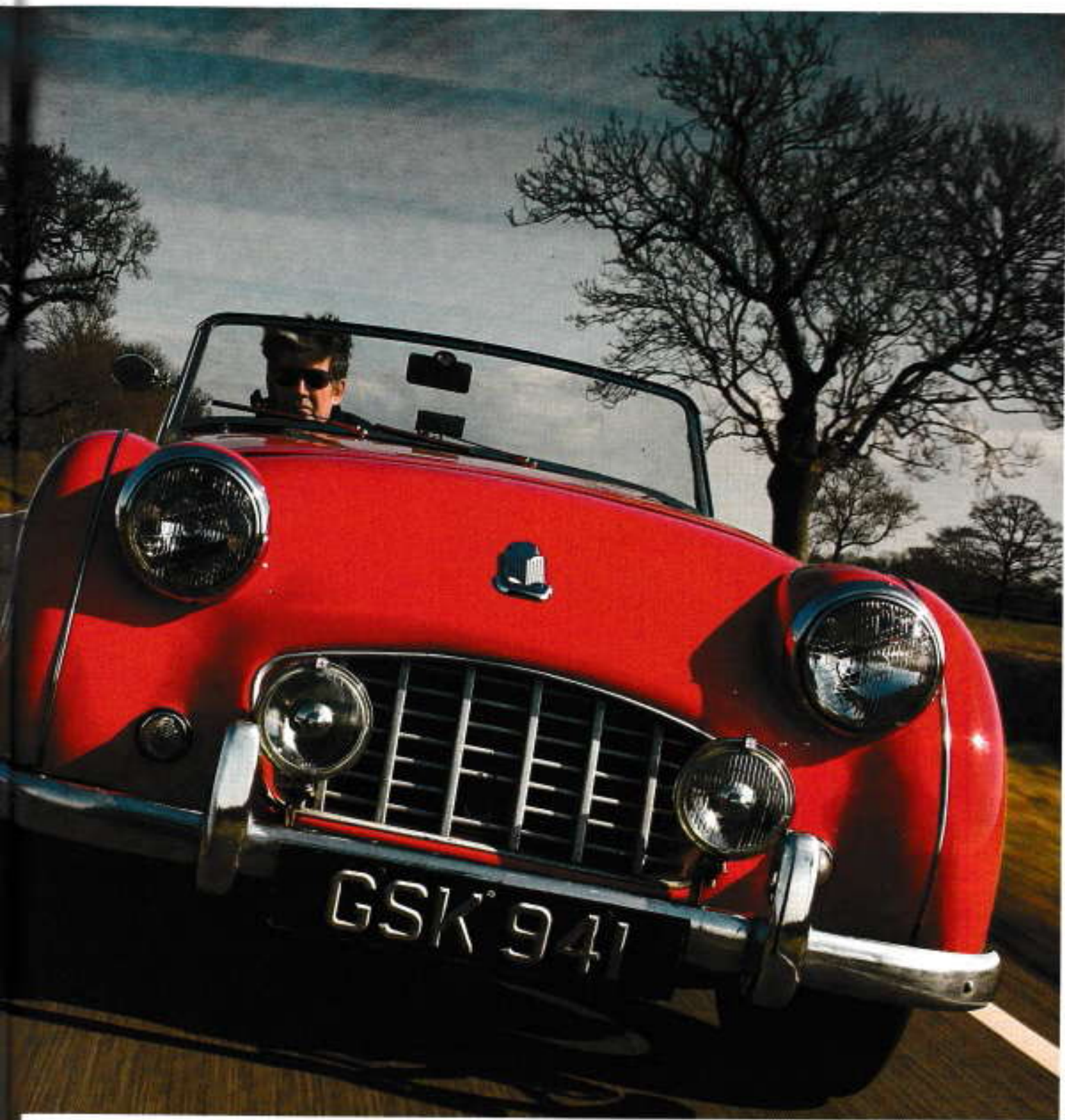


ULTIMATE SHOWDOWN #13

# MGA vs Triumph TR3

**Russ Smith** settles a sports car debate that's been raging since the 1950s – Abingdon or Canley?

PHOTOGRAPHY TONY BAKER



**T**he latter half of the 1950s was a golden era for sports car enthusiasts. Roads were still largely empty once you got away from towns, and there were no motorways to dilute the challenge and unpredictability that was then part of every journey. And, unless funds were unlimited, you would almost certainly be buying British, too, because affordable roadsters were what we did better than anyone else.

If a Jaguar or Austin-Healey was out of range, then you would probably head for a Triumph or MG showroom, and many did – the MGA became the world's best-selling sports car,

consistently outselling Triumph's early TRs.

Some have questioned whether the cars were true rivals, but Triumph certainly thought so at the time, rushing to turn the TR2 into the 3 to counter the MGAs launch in '55, and their prices were rarely more than a good dinner apart. Both the MGA and TR3 also had a shared destination in common: more than 80% of their production went to America. Likewise, it seems the majority of both now around the UK are exports that have found their way home – something that adds a little extra cachet to original UK-market cars.

We figured the MGA 1600 was the model to focus on. Unlike the 1500 it can hit the ton without the aid of gravity and sprints to 60mph rather

more rapidly. A Twin-Cam would be closer in performance – probably quicker – but it has always been a more rarefied and costly option.

The TR3 picked itself by being the middle one of the 'sidescreen' TRs, but don't get too hung up on the TR3 thing. Most comments can equally be applied to the TR2 or TR3A, because there is less difference between any of them than badge and grille changes might suggest.

Both the MG and TR are still in the same sort of price band and, with marque loyalties largely a thing of the past, you may well be considering either as the next resident of your garage.

But which is better? As madcap comic Harry Hill says, there's only one way to find out.



MGA feels more modern, with big rev counter and speedo, plus combined oil pressure/water temp and fuel gauges to left

## Interior

★★★★☆

Some degree of agility is needed to swing yourself in past the chrome-spoked banjo steering wheel into the MG's firm, low-slung seat. This turns out to be more comfortable than it looks, and the total lack of side support offered by the seat is not an issue in such a narrow cabin with its high centre armrest.

Pretty much everything is covered in the period default of black leather and vinyl, but the stylised little chrome and mesh speaker grille in the centre of the dash gives you something to smile about. The Jaeger gauges are smaller and fewer than in the TR3, and of a much newer style with their angled rims and flat glass. After sitting in the Triumph it all starts to feel rather modern until you encounter the clunking left-right indicator switch on the right-hand end of the dash. This looks and feels more appropriate to a task such as opening the bomb doors of a Lancaster.

Other Bakelite pull-switches are scattered randomly about the dash, not all bearing a small white initial to hint at their purpose. Your first drive should not be made on a dark wet night!

The MG wins on cabin storage, with handy door bins and an equal amount of stowing room as the Triumph offers behind the seats.



Charming speaker grille and undisturbed radio blank



## Styling

★★★★☆

To my mind this is still the prettiest car MG ever built, with the sort of sweeping lines and 'hips' that could easily have been styled by someone gazing out at an Alpine vista from Pininfarina's Turin styling studio. That they were actually done by a bloke called Syd in the Midlands somehow adds to the MGA's magic and mystique.

Despite being several years late, having been hidden in a cupboard while BMC fed its sports car budget to the new baby that was Austin-Healey, the MGA proved revolutionary. It was a different story under the skin, but the sleek, full-bodied design could hardly have been any further removed from its TF predecessor. Traditionalists grumbled at first, yet MG shifted more than 100,000 cars over seven years, or about 1½ times what Triumph managed with the TR3 and 3A.

With the hood stowed invisibly behind the seats, it leaves an uncluttered design without even doorhandles to disturb the flow. Adornment is limited to the masterstroke oval chrome vents either side of the bonnet with little MGA logos.

You know styling has worked when it doesn't get fiddled with, and the only visual changes made for the 1600 were larger front indicators with orange lenses, plus separate rear flashers.



Larger plinth with flasher; bigger indicators at front, too



## THE OWNER

Trish Cecile-Pritchard



**What inspired you to buy an MGA?** I wanted an affordable British sports car for my first classic, one that was easy to fix because I do a lot of my own work. The MGA was also the prettiest of those that I considered.

**How did you come by it?** A friend spotted this unmolested original British-market car at Former Glory, after what felt like an endless four-year search. It was the best we'd seen.

**'We drive it loads – even on the school run. I never use the hood: topless all year round is our motto'**

**Have you had to do much to it?** In six years it's only needed basics such as servicing and a new rad. I also fitted a five-speed box. It's so much better for long runs, and has synchro on first.

**How much do you use it?** Whenever weather permits – even on the school run. I never use the hood: topless all year round is our motto.

**Any memorable moments?** Leading the cavalcade from Abingdon for the MGA's 50th birthday in 2005, plus several runs down to Le Mans. I crammed in three people's luggage one year when my husband's Aston broke its diff.



Black vinyl and Jaeger instruments in TR3, too, but separate dials plus an ammeter. Later Moto-Lita wheel gives more legroom

## Interior

★★★★☆

Access is easier than into the MGA because of lower sills and a higher seating position. It's made even simpler here thanks to a small but rather out-of-place Moto-Lita wheel, fitted to clear the owner's thighs. With the door cutaways you feel more on than in the car, so it's nice to discover that the curved backs of the otherwise squishy seats hug you supportively in corners. But they're lousy for lumbar support, so many owners carry a small cushion to make up for this.

Like the MGA, the TR has lots of black vinyl about, this time broken up by the large chromed grab handle on the dash for nervous passengers, and two big chromed slots in each door panel to locate the sidescreens. I remain unsure of how easy it is to drive with these in place, because the cockpit is narrow and much of your right arm naturally hangs out in the breeze.

The Jaeger dials are a standout feature, not only for their curved glasses, but also for the sheer size of the speedo and rev counter staring back at the driver. Four matching smaller dials for fuel, oil, amps and coolant temperature cluster around a selection of push-me-pull-you switches in the centre. There are fewer than on the MG, but you still need time to acclimatise.



Cluster for fuel, oil, amps, temperature; sidescreen slot



## Styling

★★★★☆

There's a rough-and-ready air to the TR3. Though barely any older than the MGA, the Triumph was drawn by Walter Belgrove with simpler lines that hark back to earlier days. You can see this in the flatter side panels, headlamps mounted in raised pods and the door-tops cut away like a biplane cockpit. The rear wings need stone-shielding on their leading edges because they stick out further, plus the bonnet and boot hinges are still mounted externally.

The end result, however, is very much a full-blooded British sports car, with well-managed proportions and not a million miles away from Jaguar XK120 influences. But you have to call it purposeful rather than possessing any great beauty: a gritty character actor cast alongside the starlet MGA in our rose-tinted images of the '50s. Even Triumph's early advertising tended to focus on the cars' driving abilities while studiously ignoring any reference to their styling.

There's another trick in the TR's chunky looks: they make it appear larger than the MG, though the reverse is true. In all three important dimensions of length, width and weight, the Triumph is the smaller of the two cars, by whole inches and pounds rather than mere fractions.



Some Lucas rear lights as on MGA; quirky details age TR3



## THE OWNER

### Henry Diamond



**What inspired you to buy a TR3?** I had a TR2 when I was 21 that left me with fond memories: 18 months ago I decided that, after 40 years, it was time to have another go.

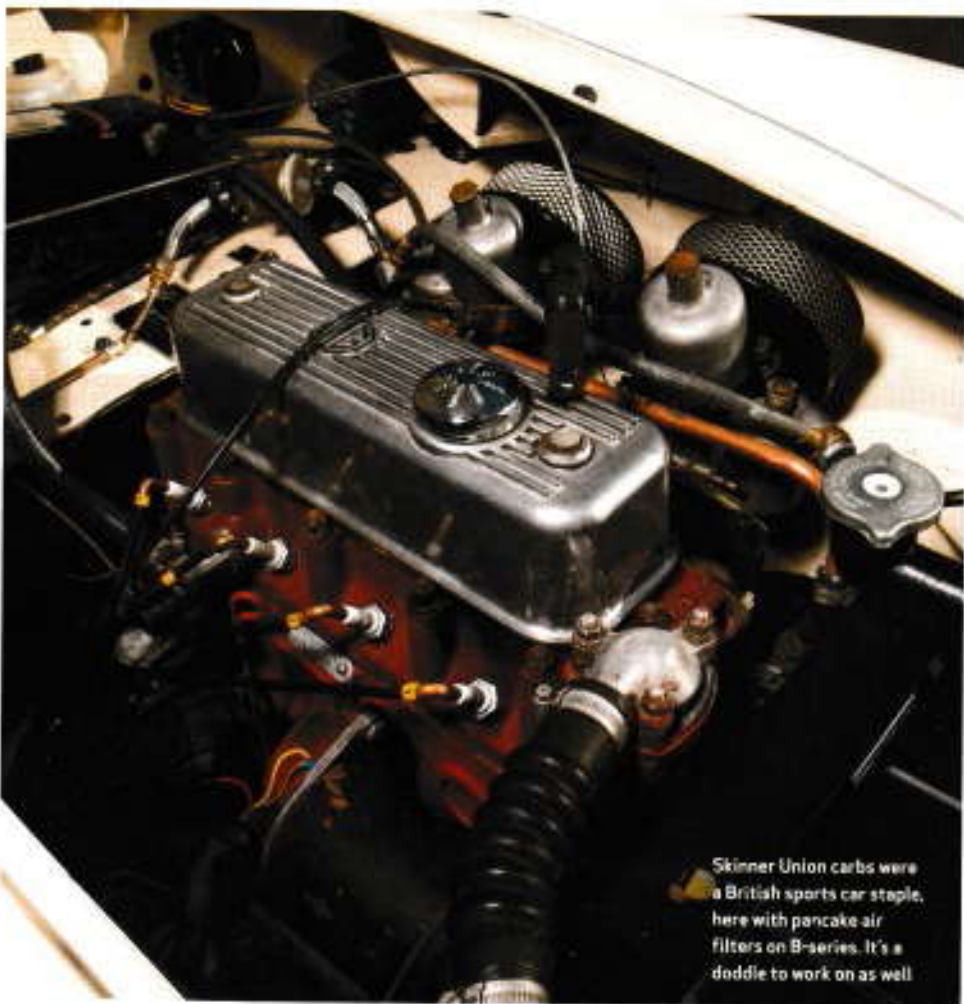
**How did you come by it?** It was at Lenham Sports Cars for the right price. It had been a dry-state US car, brought back in 1991 and converted to right-hand-drive with a rack-and-pinion set-up. Front discs were fitted, too: it was an early drum-brake car, built in 1955.

**'The greatest fun was at a charity rally, taking in Millbrook's test hills and high-speed banked bowl'**

**Have you had to do much to it?** The gearbox has been rebuilt because it kept dropping out of second, then the overdrive failed. TRGB has just done a bit of work on the brakes, too.

**How much use do you get out of it?** Most weeks as long as there's no salt about. I also do quite a few club events.

**Any memorable moments?** The greatest fun was at a charity rally, taking in the test hills and banked bowl at Millbrook. Actually, just after that the overdrive packed up...



Skinner Union carbs were a British sports car staple, here with pancake air filters on B-series. It's a doddle to work on as well

## Engine

★★★★☆

There's nothing exciting under the bonnet, I'm afraid, but the BMC B-series is a faithful old Labrador of an engine. They might get grumbly and incontinent with age, but tend to retain their easy-going temperament and willingness to work long after other engines have curled up and died. The expected twin SU carburetors help this one to put out almost 80bhp.

The 1588cc capacity used in the MGA 1600 Mk1 is actually something of a rarity. In production for just two years, it was unique to the MGA apart from finding its way into a handful of TVR Granturas. Don't let that worry you on the spares front, though, because only the bore size differs from other B-series units, all of which shared the same 88.9mm stroke.

At lower revs it sounds smoother and more subdued than the TR3, but you're not missing out on much. The MG still produces a wonderfully rorty note, and the loud buzz that issues from the exhaust on the over-run is like a heavy-metal hornet. Further up the range – where the MG is much happier to venture than the Triumph – things get significantly noisier and the engine develops a strong phlegmy crackle; imagine Brian Blessed clearing his throat.



B-series went on to power MGB and Hindustans up to '90s



## Drivetrain

★★★★☆

I've driven enough MGAs over the years to know that it was still going to win this section, even without this car's modern gearbox. The fairly short-throw and reassuringly positive action of a standard gearlever is a pleasure to use, at least until the inevitable synchro wear starts to take hold on second. At that point you either learn to double-declutch or get the gearbox rebuilt. The characteristic whine from intermediate gears will also be a constant companion.

All that's history for the car we're driving here. Its Sierra five-speed 'box is whisper-quiet and shifts, well, like a Sierra with a cut-down gearlever. A standard MGA gearknob disguises the intruder's presence, and it's one of those things that you might disagree with in principle, but soon come round to once you've tried it. Like sat-nav, or ready-mashed potato.

The MGA does need its good gearchange, because you have to shift up and down the 'box a fair bit to get the best out of the engine's more limited power band and keep it on the boil. The standard ratios are well chosen for that, even if things do get frantic at 70mph-plus cruising speeds – overdrive was never an option – and the five-speed seems to fit just as well.



Sierra five-speed 'box lurks beneath standard gearknob



## The knowledge

### What to pay

Properly restored Roadsters are now touching £25,000 at dealers, and you can add another £15k for a Twin-Cam. The 1600 De Luxe also commands a premium. Privately, you can still pick up nice cars for £15,000, but anything sub-£10k might not be the bargain it appears. Projects are getting impossible to find for less than £6000, despite the cost and complexity of a rebuild. Knock off about 20% for Coupés.

### What to look for

- Poor alignment usually spells structural problems or amateur restoration work – these bodies are hard to realign on their chassis
- Doors, bonnet and bootlid are aluminium panels on steel frames; check for electrolytic corrosion wherever the two metals meet
- Look for rot and quality of repairs in sills, door posts and flanges for bolt-on front wings
- Inspect the chassis – notably near the front – for ripples resulting from past crash damage
- Full value requires a correct MG engine, so check code stamped below centre spark-plugs starts with 15G (1500cc) or 16G (1600cc)

### What to read

- Original MGA Clausager
- MGA First of a New Line Price-Williams
- MGA The Complete Story Styles

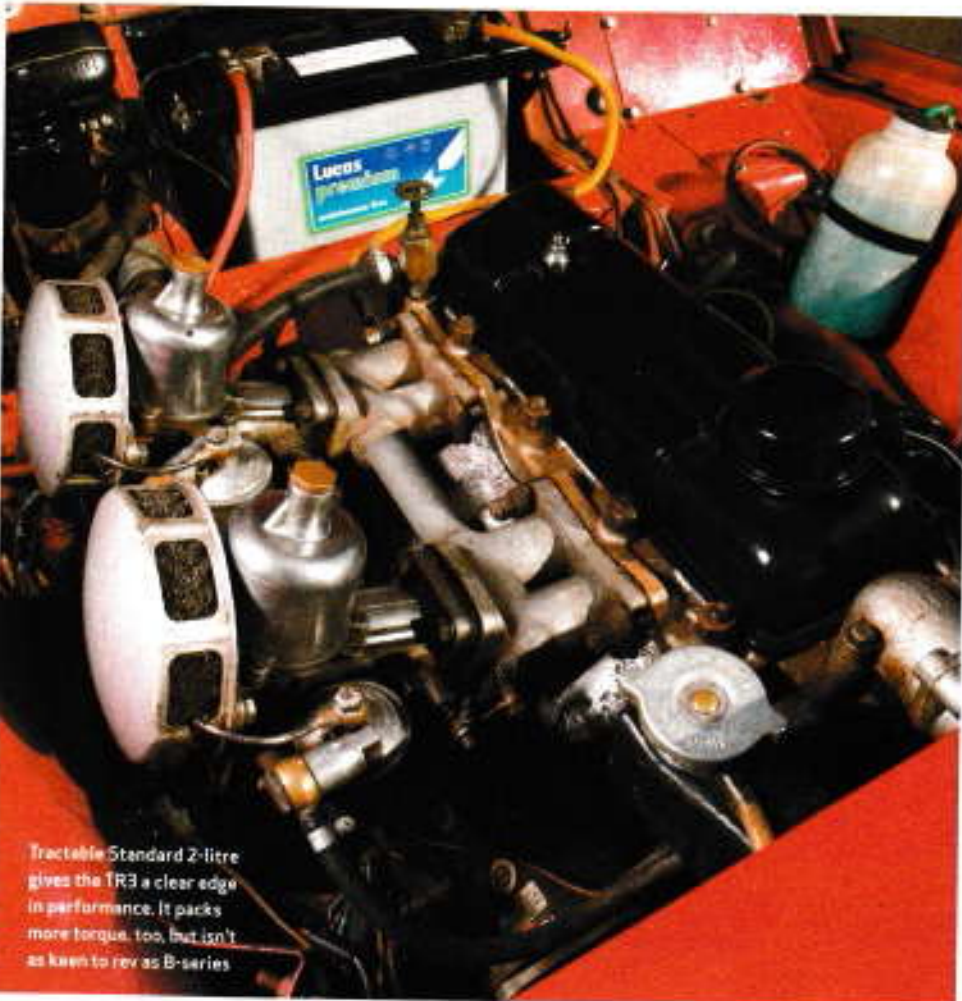
### The clubs

- MG Car Club [www.mgcc.co.uk](http://www.mgcc.co.uk)
- MG Owners' Club [www.mgownersclub.co.uk](http://www.mgownersclub.co.uk)



## THE EXPERT'S VIEW Steve Hall, Hall's Garage

"I'd rather have an MGA 1600 than any other MG. It's pretty, sits on a taut chassis unlike the door-rattling TR, plus it has good handling and brakes. They're just lovely. When buying, make the usual oil-pressure checks. Any bodywork is going to be expensive; these are the most costly post-war MGs to restore."



Tractable Standard 2-litre gives the TR3 a clear edge in performance. It packs more torque, too, but isn't as keen to rev as B-series

## Engine

★★★★☆

If anything, the engine in the TR3 has even humbler origins than the MG's. Launched not long after WW2, its early years were spent powering Standard Vanguards and Ferguson tractors. It proved pretty indestructible in those roles, however, and that's a characteristic that remained even after this wet-liner 'four' was slightly downsized to slot under the 2-litre class limit, then tuned and fitted with twin carbs.

Despite those tweaks it is more of a slogger than the MG's B-series, with both peak power and torque much lower down the rev range. The TR makes the most of its extra 400cc capacity though, with a 15bhp advantage and, more tellingly, an extra 30lb ft of torque over the MG. Miraculously, it also drinks less fuel.

One of the TR3's claimed improvements over its predecessor was a quieter exhaust, but even at low revs it produces the sort of gruff, woofling note that a petrolhead can pick up three streets away. Shy and retiring it isn't. More revs translates naturally into more noise and, though it might not be the kind of sound that has us scribbles penning pieces for inclusion in *Private Eye's* 'Pseudos Corner', there's real purpose to its if not quite angry then at least jolly miffed snarl.



TR3 sports twin SUs, too, but 1 3/4in instead of MG's 1 1/2in

## Drivetrain

★★★★☆

I think it's fair to say that I didn't really get on with the TR3's gearbox. The clutch is nicely weighted, but the short-throw gearshift is still stiff on this recently rebuilt 'box, and it makes unhappy graunching noises if you are too quick and forceful with it. Double-declutching helps enormously, but I'm rather out of practice with that particular dance routine. It doesn't help that the lever disappears under the dashboard in first and third, and your hand tangles with the keyring that dangles in front of it.

That the drivetrain scores as highly as it does is entirely down to the excellent overdrive that operates on second, third and fourth. Judicious use of this removes the need for much lever action once you are on the move, with the ability to snick between third and overdrive a particularly rewarding game to play on country lanes. With that much choice, there's always a right ratio to be in, and cruising is easy on the ear.

The switch for the overdrive is perfectly positioned to flick with a spare right finger without taking your hand off the wheel. It's on the end of a strange, thin box that protrudes from the dashboard. Flaking and battered, this looks like the quite part of this TR that hasn't been restored.



Redline is at 5000rpm; gearchange isn't as slick as MGA's

## The knowledge

### What to pay

Prices of early TRs have risen strongly, with disc-braked 100bhp TR3s considered the pick of the bunch. You can pay up to £25,000 for a recently restored one at a dealer. Even a nice, useable example won't leave you much change out of £13-16,000 privately. Projects start from £5000, but there aren't many real basket-cases left. Beware of mid-priced cars that have been poorly restored in the past.

### What to look for

- Plenty of TR3s have suffered poor rebuilds, so check for tight and even panel gaps
- Floorpans, A-posts and inner rear panels are particularly susceptible to rust
- Inspect chassis - especially on US imports - for ripples and kinks caused by past collisions. Rusty outriggers are easy to replace
- Engines are tough, but check the oil-pressure gauge. A reading of under 50psi at 3000rpm when hot means it's getting tired
- Expect to pay about £500 more for any TR3 that has the sought-after factory hard-top

### What to read

- *Original Triumph TR2/3/3A* Piggot & Clay
- *Triumph TR2, 3 and 3A in Detail* Piggot
- *Triumph TR2 to 6 Last of the Traditional Sports Cars* Piggot

### The clubs

- TR Register [www.tr-register.co.uk](http://www.tr-register.co.uk)
- Club Triumph [www.club.triumph.org.uk](http://www.club.triumph.org.uk)



## THE EXPERT'S VIEW Mike Ellis, TR Register

"When I first bought one 40 years ago I did try the MGA. The main reasons for choosing the TR3 were its much better acceleration and more chuckable feel. For restored cars, check that the work has been done to a high standard. Virtually all mechanical components are either available or can be rebuilt."



MG lacks power against its rival, yet Smith says it's deceptively quick – as long as you work the engine

## Performance

★★★★☆

Once we'd established that the MGA was actually heavier than the TR3, there was no way that it could ever make up for that 400cc capacity deficit. So it loses this section, but don't go away with the idea that the MGA is a slow car. Compared to many similar sports cars it is light, and is certainly lively. Also, in most situations you get the feeling that it would give the car that replaced it – the MGB – a good run for its money.

The performance is all very accessible, too, making this a car that's a joy to drive fast. You can quickly find yourself exceeding the speed limit on A-roads without noticing, having buzzed your way up through the gears. I'm told it will happily cruise all day in the 75–80mph range.

Outright acceleration does rely on holding on to gears for a whisker longer than your ears tell you sounds comfortable, but that's the way to get the best out of the car.

You can make gains with a touch of late braking, too. Front discs were introduced with the 1600 engine: they feel good and scrub off speed without any dramas, but with plenty of pedal feel. There's no servo, though, and to be honest you don't really notice the lack of it. Just expect to put some effort into slowing down.

## Handling

★★★★☆

The MGA is good fun to play about with, rewarding the right sort of driver input. Don't worry: it's quite benign and trustworthy and won't try to catch you out, it just wants to go where you point it. Precise rack-and-pinion steering with lots of feedback contributes much to this. The wheel is large but a comfortable size and the smooth, thin rim is lovely to hold, if a little close to your chest. Changes of direction can be made quickly, as we discover when confronted by the urgent need to weave between a large pothole and an oncoming Toyota.

The overall handling hovers around neutral. Take too much speed into a bend and the MGA will understeer a tad, so you quickly learn not to. Then you can revel in the pleasure of getting on the throttle quite early into the corner and balancing the car on that. Even near the limit that essential feedback loop between your right foot, your hands and the seat of your trousers remains a delight and not a fear.

With such sporty handling, the ride comes as a surprise. Yes, there's a degree of firmness, but with enough travel for the suspension not to jar or crash much over rougher surfaces. You could certainly cover fair distances in comfort.

## SPECIFICATIONS

**Sold/number built** 1959-'61/28,730 (1600)  
**Construction** steel and aluminium body, steel chassis  
**Engine** all-iron, overhead-valve 1588cc 'four', with twin 1½in SU carburettors  
**Max power** 79% bhp @ 5600rpm  
**Max torque** 87lb ft @ 3800rpm  
**Transmission** four-speed manual, driving rear wheels  
**Suspension: front** independent, by wishbones, coil springs  
**rear** live axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs; lever-arm dampers  
**f/r**  
**Steering** rack and pinion  
**Brakes** 10in discs front, 10in drums rear  
**Wheels & tyres** 4x15in wires, 165x15 radials  
**Length** 13ft (3962mm) **Wheelbase** 7ft 10in (2388mm) **Width** 4ft 10in (1672mm) **Height** 4ft 2in (1270mm) **Weight** 2030lb (922kg)  
**0-60mph** 14.2 secs **Top speed** 101mph  
**Mpg** 24 **Price new** £940

## EVOLUTION

**1952** MG shows sleek prototype of TD successor, but BMC builds A-Hs instead  
**1955** That T-series replacement finally arrives in September as the MGA, using a breaded-on 68bhp version of the Magnette's 1489cc B-series engine, soon upped to 72bhp  
**1956** Coupé added in the autumn  
**1958** 108bhp Twin-Cam launched, with engine bored out to 1588cc. It lasts just two years  
**1959** Standard MGAs get the higher-capacity block plus front discs to become the 1600  
**1961** New grille and tail-lights, along with 86bhp from a capacity increase to 1622cc, mark the arrival of the MGA 1600 Mk2  
**1962** The replacement MGB hits town



Main gauges reversed in MG; glorious, uncluttered profile

MGA is more forgiving than Triumph, plus it rides better





Ever-eager Triumph still cuts it in modern traffic, where its tiny size is ideal for nipping into any gap

## Performance

★★★★☆

Having a robust two-litre engine in such a small and light body has always given the TR3 a bit of a competition edge. They were popular for circuit and particularly rally use well into the early '60s, and are still a top choice for historic rally events, especially those featuring steep climbs, or with a high endurance factor.

All of which translates into the TR3 being a handy road car, with flexible power delivery. You could easily use one as a daily driver without having to make excuses. Its ability to nip smartly off the line and dice with the most aggressive of commuter traffic ought to put a smile on anyone's face. You might want to invest in some motorbike clothing though, given our climate.

If you still need convincing, consider the TR's acceleration figures. The 1956-on 100bhp version sprints to 50mph in 7.8 secs, and reaches 60mph in 11.4. Not incredible by modern standards, but that's bang on par with our great sporting icon, the Austin-Healey 3000.

You have no trouble stopping, either, because the TR3 has bigger discs than the MGA. Strictly, this early drum-brake car shouldn't have them, but more were sold with than without in the first place, and many others have since been uprated.



Overdrive on top three effectively gives seven-speed 'box

## Handling

★★★★☆

The sort of winding, up-and-down lanes that these cars were born to is where they really come together and start to excel. It helps that the TR3 is so narrow – you quickly gain the confidence to push it along at a fair old lick. Being slimline also compensates for the TR's tendency to move around a bit on uneven surfaces. You always have to concentrate and be ready to correct. The quite stiffly sprung rear end also breaks loose rather too easily on rougher roads or the smallest patch of dirt, though it's mostly easy enough to catch.

Get on to smoother tarmac and the car transforms, feeling like a classic racer with its firm ride and neutral handling. All the while, every movement of the front wheels is fed back to your hands, and that's not just a feature of the rack-and-pinion steering conversion fitted to this TR. From much past experience I remember that similar messages are delivered from the standard steering box – only there the feeling is slightly blunted by the inevitable play in such a system, and the extra effort needed to turn the wheel.

Scuttle shake? Yes, of course, it's an old Triumph sports car, and it's far more noticeable than in the MGA. The ride is firmer, too, but Triumph compensated with a softer seat squab.



Chuckable TR3 is great fun but gets skittish over bumps

## SPECIFICATIONS

**Produced/built** 1955-'57/13,377

**Construction** steel body, steel chassis

**Engine** all-iron, overhead-valve 1991cc 'four', with twin 1½in SU carburettors

**Max power** 95bhp @ 5000rpm

**Max torque** 117½lb ft @ 3000rpm

**Transmission** four-speed manual, with overdrive on top three, driving rear wheels

**Suspension: front** independent, by wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers **rear** live axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs, lever-arm dampers

**Steering** cam and lever **Brakes** 11in discs front, 10in drums rear

**Wheels & tyres**

4½x15in wires, 165x15 radials

**Length** 12ft 7in (3835mm) **Wheelbase** 7ft 4in

(2235mm) **Width** 4ft 7½in (1410mm) **Height**

4ft 2in (1270mm) **Weight** 1988lb (902kg)

**0-60mph** 12 secs **Top speed** 105mph

**Mpg** 28 **Price new** £976

## EVOLUTION

**1952** 20TS prototype shown at Earls Court.

People like the car but it needs development

**1953** TR2 launched at Geneva show in March

**1954** TR2s win the Alpine Rally team prize

**1955** In September, close to the MGA's launch,

the TR2 is given a flush grille, bigger carbs

plus a quieter exhaust and becomes the TR3

**1956** In September Triumph pulls off a coup

by making the TR3 the first British production

car with disc brakes. A 'high-port' head gives

another 5bhp and the rear axle is beefed up

**1957** September: a wide mouth and the

wonder of external doorhandles – voilà TR3A

**1961** TR4 debut; short-lived 3B returns for US



**NEXT UP  
FERRARI  
DAYTONA VS  
MASERATI GIBLI**  
Maranello meets Modena away from home for the battle of the finest front-engined GTs: is one worth twice as much?

Syd Enever's sensational MGA had the looks to match anything Italian, while Walter Balgrove's bullish TRs had the brawn to beat them on the stages

## The verdict

This is a tough call to make, despite the marked differences between this pair. With the individual scores totting up as dead level – and prices roughly on a par – I'll need to dig deeper to come up with a decision.

It has to be said that an MGA wouldn't be quite as nice without this one's five-speed gearbox, which explains why so many have now been fitted with them. Then again, standard TR3 cam-and-lever steering is nowhere near as enjoyable as this car's rack-and-pinion set-up, so those cheaty bits cancel each other out.

Part of me wants the MGA to come out on top purely because I love the way it looks. But I also desperately want to recline its seatback an inch or two so that the steering wheel's further away and I can unfold my arms. That aside, the MGA is probably more comfortable for covering any distance in. If you want an easy life, it's the one you'll get used to more quickly, and is less likely to catch you out with any tail-wagging antics.

As well as being quicker, the TR3 offers a more raw and elemental motoring experience, and should be warmly applauded for that. Driving one requires some spirit of adventure, and the peripheral sight of tarmac rushing by so close to your elbow might put off those used to cosseting cabins. I reckon that door cutaway alone must add at least 20mph to your perceived speed.

Mr Toad would love it, and if there's so much as an ounce of 'parp-parp' about your person, you will too. I think on this occasion that's enough to just edge the TR ahead of the smoother, more genteel MGA.

## SWAP SHOP

### Owners exchange keys

#### TR3 OWNER DIAMOND ON THE MGA

"A lovely, well-sorted car and easy to drive. There's less scuttle shake than in the TR, but also less torque. You have to use the box a lot to make it work for a living. At 6ft 2in I found getting in and out a challenge. I also couldn't drive it that far unless there's a way of getting the seat further back – there's just not enough room and, like an XK120, the wheel's too close."



#### MGA OWNER CECILE-PRITCHARD ON THE TR3

"It feels solid, has a meatier engine sound and is a more powerful animal altogether. Having all those gears to play with, you could tour for ever. And I love that definite gearchange – it's not namby-pamby. Everything's neatly to hand, but I did grab the keyfob to change gear once. The curved glass on the gauges is lovely. I'm very surprised – I could be tempted."

## The alternatives



#### MORGAN PLUS 4

**Sold/number built** 1953-68/3642  
**0-60mph** 9.7 secs **Top speed** 100mph **Mpg** 30  
**Price new** £1018 **Price now** £8500-25,000  
Just the thing if the TR3 is still too modern: it even uses TR engines. They are handed down as often as they are sold. Beware of wood rot.



#### AUSTIN-HEALEY 100

**Sold/number built** 1953-56/14,634  
**0-60mph** 11.7 secs **Top speed** 106mph **Mpg** 22  
**Price new** £1064 **Price now** £15-33,500  
The car that kept the MGA on hold: crude, brutish, yet packed with character and almost universally loved. Take advice when buying one: there are still some iffy rushed rebuilds about.