

America's Sports Car Sweetheart

EXPERTS MAY ARGUE WHETHER IT really was the MG TC that lit America's fire for imported sports cars. After all, few TCs were sold here, compared to the substantial number of TDs that followed. But this TC was present—and at the heart of the matter—when the love affair began.

MG began building the TC in October 1945; not surprisingly, it was essentially a prewar TB, widened four inches in the cockpit and simplified by swapping the TB's sliding-trunnion front suspension for a proven solid axle and leaf springs. Exactly 10,000 were manufactured in a four-year run, with 2001 of those exported to the United States.

Road & Track associate editor John Bond bought this 1947 TC in 1949 and on Valentine's Day presented it to Elaine Williams, an amateur race driver and his bride-to-be. Later Bond and Williams would buy the foundering magazine and steer it toward success. Retired from racing, Elaine parked her TC in *Road & Track*'s lobby, where it came to be regarded as a minor landmark.

Restorer Mitch Leland acquired the MG in the early '70s and totally rebuilt the car. Leland made improvements as well, including some better-than-stock components in its worm-and-sector steering. He had the cylinders bored 0.020 inch over and the head ported and ground 0.100 inch under. But Leland had barely bolted it all back together when Chicago collector Ben Rose offered him \$5,500 for his effort—an offer too good to refuse.

Around this same time *Road Test* magazine produced a poster featuring the ex-Bond MG as a giveaway with a year's subscription. (It hung in this humble scribe's bedroom throughout high school.) Current owners Dennis and Ann Marie Nash bought the TC in 1997.

The seatbacks adjust fore and aft, but the seat cushions don't, forcing shorter drivers to sit on the front edge of the cushion. The footwells are long and narrow, with the gas, brake and clutch pedals

speed. How fast are we going? Who cares? It feels terrific!

The large plastic steering wheel flexes and springs in a driver's hands while rubbing hard against the thighs. The steering ratio is extremely fast, but the effort level seems high for a car weighing only 1735 pounds. The MG's nose wants to sniff and hunt, left and right, like a cartoon hound dog, and it requires a conscious effort not to over-correct. Corners suggest an odd ratcheting sensation, as the little car's

actual yaw rate lags a heartbeat behind steering input. Sitting just ahead of the rear axle, it feels like riding on a slow-motion Tilt-A-Whirl.

Still, the TC rides better than expected, at least on relatively smooth suburban roads. Yes, its 94-inch wheelbase is short and its springs are stiff, but the MG's body-on-frame construction is solid—no squeaks, no rattles, no jostling. The vacuum-boosted hydraulic brakes feel tight and modern, with very little pedal travel. Overall, the TC presents a splendid buffet of driving sensations, compromised only by the uncomfortable dance demanded by the randomly awful placement of the pedals.

The TD that followed updated the same body and driveline with rack-and-pinion steering, double-wishbone front suspension, a hypoid rear axle, pressed steel wheels and available left-hand drive. Of 29,644 made, 23,500 were shipped to these shores. So whether or not the TC actually fired up the romance, it was the TD, undeniably, that spread the love around. —JOHN F. KATZ



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positioned perfectly for anyone whose left leg is 12 inches longer than his right.

In stock tune the 1250-cc pushrod four developed 54 hp at 5200 rpm, and we doubt Leland's modifications have made a dramatic difference. Pressed only moderately, it sings a stirring race-car soprano, with just a hint of accompanying gear whine in the lower ratios. The gearbox is tight, but slick and precise, and can be slammed up and down with drag-race abandon. The small, racing-style windscreens exaggerate our

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Jealous of the T-Bird and dismayed by the pathetic performance of the Blue Flame Six

Corvette, Oldsmobile pushed hard for a V8-equipped two-seater of its own, but without success. According to our sources, this car was bought a few years ago for about \$500,000 by a collector who recently offered it to a museum for less than \$200,000. At Barrett-Jackson, everyone thought anything over \$700,000 would be a home run. At \$3.2 million, this is the most expensive car B-J has ever sold; it sets a new baseline for what concept cars with historical significance can be worth, and it made for one very happy seller. —KEITH MARTIN