

If you are lucky enough to have more than the £2,000 or so it took to buy an example of last month's selection of sports cars, then you might consider blowing it on something a little more unusual, a little less common and therefore a little more expensive!

The cars in this category, no more and no less 'sporty' than last month's group, are not

quite so susceptible to the seasonal price fluctuations of the vehicles in the lower prices category, whereby soft tops are cheaper in winter and hardtops cheaper in summer.

Once again we have adopted the technique of allowing the *Practical Classics* writers to talk freely about their own experiences with these cars and once again, the emphasis is as much on the pitfalls of sports car ownership as it is on the obvious pleasures.

Classic Sports Cars Compared

PART 2

ABOUT THE CARS

Michael Brisby has owned his MGA for more than 12 years and probably chose the car before they were widely considered to be worth preserving and he hasn't found anything since which would tempt him to sell the car. He finds that, like an old friend, the car can still surprise him – for example, he only recently realised that of more than 100,000 MGAs built between 1955 and 1962, only about 5,000 are thought to have been sold on the British market and as that includes three sizes of pushrod engine (BMC B series with three-bearing crankshaft) and the twin cam, and those are further divided by the roadster (notice how that model description reflects the importance of the North American market) and the coupe, so none of the versions are particularly common in Britain.

That the BMC leadership favoured the Triumph name to the virtual exclusion of MG is now legend. The MGB, neglected by the company, was forced to soldier on in its original guise while TRs in no less than six variations (4, 4A, 5, 6, 7 and 8) were the favoured children. The only truly exciting development, the fitting of the ubiquitous Buick-based Rover V8 engine, was left to independent concerns like Costello to initiate. The 'official' MGB GT V8 finally arrived in 1973 and production lasted only until 1977. The car was only available as a GT and it proved to be both rapid and desirable.

While we are not studying the MGC, it is worth noting that this version was available

as a roadster or GT between 1967 and 1969. At the time it was far from popular and gained the perhaps unfair reputation of having the wet-handling of a brick. Popularity increased when production ceased.

The TR5 was produced in 1967/8 and its main features included the chassis from the TR4A and the six cylinder Lucas fuel injected engine which produced 150 bhp at 5,500 rpm. Only the body styling changed for the TR6 which was produced from the end of 1968 to the end of 1975 (except that from November 1972, cars with CR commission numbers produced 124 bhp at 5,000 rpm).

If there was ever a sports car with a ready made legend, it is that so-called 'Big Healey'. We've all heard the flat-caps talking about them at pub meets haven't we? 'Blah blah Big Healey blah blah left a Ferrari for dead blah blah'. How much of the legend is fact?

The 100 was the belle of the 1952 Motor Show. It boasted the four-cylinder A90 Atlantic engine which produced a fairly humble 90 bhp in this version but a respectable 132 bhp as the 100S. The 100 was the poor relation with this 'soft' engine and three speed box but, just recently has almost hit the popularity level (if not the value) of the most popular big Healey, the 3000.

The 100/6 falls between two stools lacking the primitive appeal of the 100 and the performance of the 3000. The 3000 lived from



Austin Healey



Jensen Healey



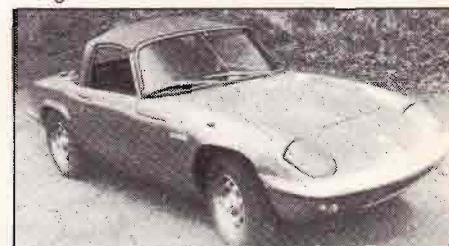
MGA



Marcos



Morgan



Lotus Elan



Triumph TR



MGB GT V8

Continued

Classic Sports Cars Compared

1959 to 1968 with an engine producing 124 bhp at 4,600 rpm in the MkI cars and 148 bhp at 5,250 in the final MKIII. In some models, the two occasional rear seats were traded for extra luggage space.

The first Marcos GT appeared in 1964, the product of Jem Marsh and Frank Costin. That car was powered by the Volvo engine from the P1800 and had a sleek, aerodynamic glass fibre body. It was, perhaps, best known for its marine ply monocoque chassis. The car was blessed with a variety of power units in the ensuing years, the biggest, most powerful (and, according to Geoff Le Prevost, the most desirable) being the Ford V6 three litre.

That wooden chassis was eventually replaced by a frame built in square section steel tube which not only met US federal safety standards but was also far less labour intensive to produce. Many of these cars were sold as kits so it is quite likely that the car you look at will be totally different from any other

Technical Data							
	Overall length	Top speed	0-60 (sec)	MPG (approx)	cc	Front wing	Exchange engine
MGA	13ft	98	15.6	30	1489	£169	n/a
MGB GT V8	12ft 10 ³ / ₄ in	125	8.6	25	3528	£69.50	£675 (Rover)
TR6	13ft 3in	119	8.2	22	2498	£18 (g/f)	£425
Austin Healey 100/3000	13ft 1 ¹ / ₂ in	121	9.8	22	2912	£125	n/a
Marcos	13ft 3in	120	7.5	24	2994	n/a	£376
Jensen Healey	13ft 10in	119	8.7	21	1973	£119	£1600 (short)
Lotus Elan	12ft 1in	115	8.7	26	1558	n/a	£750
Morgan + 8	12ft 3in	123	6.5	22	3528	£228	£675 (Rover)

Marcos. Production ended in 1971 but has resumed, with an almost unaltered car, in the eighties.

If the original 'Big Healeys' were worshipped in legend, then the attempt to repeat the formula with the Jensen Healey in 1972 produced the exact antithesis. The car quickly acquired the most awful reputation for engine failure rivalled perhaps only by the

Stag. The Triumph V8 motor has managed to clear its name - The Lotus 907 unit in the Jensen Healey however continues to worry prospective buyers even though enthusiasts will tell you that the problems were sorted years ago.

The car itself is a motor industry co-operative. It is a Healey built by Jensen, powered by Lotus with a Vauxhall gearbox and run-

DANGER AREAS

For a sports car to have had a different owner for every year of its life is not unusual or necessarily a bad sign. But out of maybe a dozen owners, you can bet your boots that at least one will have thrashed the car mercilessly. Therefore you should expect a used sports car to be just that. The average example will have stopped looking like the colour pictures in the glossy magazines a long time ago. If you want an expensive-looking sports car, be prepared to write an expensive looking cheque - and then some more to keep it looking that way.

As we pointed out last month, body sag is an all-too-common feature of aging, open topped cars. Check the door gaps and that the doors open and close without sticking. Check also that the car is indeed the model the seller represents it to be. He probably isn't a crook, but the chap who sold the car to *him* might have been.

Inner sills and door post structures are prone to rot on any MGA and the chassis itself can corrode in a number of places, notably near the rear posts, the front door posts and where the floors butt against the inner face of the chassis rails. You should also check the wings and the front shroud where they meet. Both tend to rust and each is expensive to replace. The front wings behind the front wheels and the rear wings ahead of the rear wheels are key points to check for rot. The B series engine will slog on for years after it should, by rights, have turned up its toes.

The MGB GT V8 bodywork will have the

same problem areas as the 1800 MGB mentioned last month but we would expect to find the average V8 in better condition than an average B. The higher prices commanded by these cars mean that owners are less likely to abuse or neglect their investments - this does not mean that all V8s are good cars though!

Expect to find rot in the rear ends of the front wings, in the sills and in the wheel arches. Floor damage should be less of a possibility as all genuine MG V8s are GTs. If the car isn't a 'real' MG it could be a Costello, which is very good but rare, or a specialist conversion which will probably be good but should be thoroughly checked over, or it could be a DIY job in which case, the only person who should be asked to risk his neck is the chap who did it.

The box section chassis of the Triumph TR5 was considered a sturdy structure and not particularly prone to corrosion but, says John Williams, it is now 17 years since the first TR5s were made, which is ample time for rust to set in. Suspension mounting points and the brackets which attach to them are weak areas, particularly the front ones. Brackets and welds should be checked carefully (and regularly) and the differential mountings also require examination as the torque involved under acceleration has been known to break diffs away from the chassis.

Check underneath for the condition of brake pipes, footwells, sills and the lower edges of the wings. The main mechanical weakness is the crankshaft's tendency to drop its' thrust washers - check by attempt-

ing to move the fan backwards and forwards. It shouldn't budge.

The main problem with big Healeys so far is the bodywork is concerned is that the steel floor from bulkhead to boot is welded on to the chassis frame, Paul Skilleter points out. This means that while the outer wings can be unbolted, the body cannot be lifted off the chassis for restoration without the use of the cutting torch. However, sills, inner wings and bulkhead can be replaced individually or repaired so, apart from checking these areas, the condition of the chassis is all important.

The aluminium shrouds which surround the engine bay and the boot should also be carefully checked. They are difficult and expensive to repair or replace if damaged by accident or corrosion (which sets in at the joint between the aluminium shroud and the steel wings). The front suspension legs just behind the front suspension should be checked for kinks from an otherwise disguised accident. Look especially at where the damper mounts on the suspension pillar as this can crack and damper and pillar will gently collapse inwards.

The glass fibre body of the Marcos seems to have been endowed with a long life expectancy. Check for signs of crash damage and for crazing in the colour coat which might indicate that the body is flexing, perhaps due to body mounting-point damage. The tubular steel chassis should be checked at the suspension mounting-points and, even with a wood chassised car there was a steel front sub-frame to rust.

PARTS AVAILABILITY

MGs are among the best-served of the classic sports cars and availability is not a problem for either the MGA or the V8.

The MGA's body panels, particularly the vulnerable front wings and shroud, are huge panels and therefore expensive to replace.

Spares for the early drum brakes (not as bad as some people make them out to be) are said to be much easier and cheaper to obtain than

ning gear. It was designed by a former Rootes/Rover man with 'advice' from a Jaguar designer to the requirements of a car salesman with an unpronounceable name and all aimed at the American market. How could it fail?

There was something about Lotus sports cars which made producers give them starring roles. For the Seven it was *The Prisoner* and for the Elan, it was *The Avengers* where it provided cheeky transport for the chic Emma Peel. In the impetuous, change-hungry sixties it became as 'trendy' as the Beatles, the idle rich and mini skirts.

The car certainly had the elan which its name suggested, but it also gained the reputation, perhaps not totally justifiably, of being fragile. It was said that if you were thinking of driving more than walking distance away from home then you should really take a mechanic with you. In truth, you do need to be something of an enthusiast to keep the car in one piece and running perfectly.

The Morgan in its unchanging body shapes and various engine sizes is the epitome of British functional sports car design. The uncompromising – and uncompromised –



The Big Healey! Macho image and a big price tag.

body shell owes nothing to outside influences like the demands of the American market, the silver lining which clouded the minds of so many other sports car manufacturers.

For all that the car was not adulterated visually for the North Americans, the later cars conform to emission controls and pre-emission Morgans are all too often lost to export – history sold on for a fistful of dollars.



The elegant Marcos – the DIY classic.

The wood chassis might not rot like steel, but it will certainly rot like wood given half a chance. The wood can be repaired, but it is something of a specialised task.

The problems associated with finding a good Jensen Healey do not stop in the engine bay. Time has proved that neglected examples rot at a prodigious rate. Geoff Le Prevost remembers seeing an example which had a line of rust beside every wing, sill, door and headlamp, joint. This was probably a particularly bad specimen but you should check every outer panel, look at the front inner wings, then go underneath to make sure sills and floorpan are still there.

The primary engine faults are caused by the lubrication system which, in extreme conditions, oils up everything but the inside of the motor. Check the engine for oil leaks; a duff engine tends to look just that and it will certainly sound 'wrong'. A good motor will be very responsive.

The Lotus Elan has a steel 'backbone' chassis with a turret at each of the four extremities to support the suspension. All four turrets should be checked for corrosion which leads to misalignment and eventual collapse of the suspension. The front cross member of the chassis acts as a vacuum reservoir and if this has become porous or holed by rust, the headlamps will not stay up for long with the engine switched off.

Much of the forward half of the chassis is protected from rust by oil from the engine, but cracks do develop and you should look for these around the base of each front sus-



pension turret, around the engine mountings and sometimes at the rear of the central backbone section where it joins the 'Y' section.

If availability of Morgans (or the lack of it) is one major problem, then the next hurdle is bound to be the car's condition. When Michael Brisby looked at buying a Morgan for restoration back in September 1981, he commented that the bodywork deteriorated quickly under normal usage conditions – far quicker than most would expect for a hand-built car of this price.

Although the car is craftsman built, the timber-framed body is susceptible to corrosion of steel and aluminium panels as well as wood rot. A great variety of power units were used in early Morgans, but they all proved to be fairly resilient and there are no major weaknesses.

What the MGA lacks in brute force it makes up for with fleetness of foot.



The MGB GT V8 and its' Rover Buick engine made for an exciting car.

those for the later disc brakes.

The V8 shares most components with the 1800 GT version. There are some 'beefed up'

parts but there should not be any problem finding them, and of course, the engine in more or less the same guise is still in

Classic Sports Car Comparison
Continued

production.

The availability of parts for the TR5 and TR6 is now considered better in many ways than when the cars were current thanks to the concentration of available parts and knowledge within the realms of a relatively few specialists.

Some parts are scarce or seemingly unobtainable, such as chassis repair sections, TR5 rear bumpers, rear lamp units, chrome mouldings and the rubber parts for the TR5 Surrey top. There are also interior

trim items for both cars which now prove unobtainable, such as the lower dash crash pads.

There will be many similar parts unobtainable for the big Healeys which are the 'most obsolete' cars in this month's selection. Paul Skilleter reports, however, that there is an increasingly good supply of spares from specialist dealers.

The Marcos, as we said earlier, is now back in production in an almost unaltered form, so spares for the steel chassised cars should not be a problem and wood chassised cars need 'only' the attention of a skilled wood worker. As so many of the cars were constructed from

kits, the question of originality barely arises. Engine and transmission spares, certainly for the Ford units, are no problem.

The spares situation for the Jensen Healey is very good, with all parts reputed to be still available new. Jensen themselves specialise in rebuilding these cars and they carry a list of outside suppliers which were, in the main, original sources for manufacture.

You can rebuild any series Lotus Elan from the ground up with no problem in the way of major component or, say the owners, even the 'slow moving' parts. There are some shared parts (Triumph suspension for instance) which are all still readily available,

WHAT TO PAY

The cars which we have spotlighted this month fall loosely into the 'over £2,000' bracket, although rough examples of most can be found at less than this price. With performance cars perhaps more than the average classic saloon, it is easy to pay a lot of money for a car which still requires a lot of work to bring back the original performance and sparkle. This should be balanced against the idea of buying an inexpensive 'basket case' which obviously needs a lot of money to rebuild but which you know will be right in the end.

A rotten but running MGA might be found for between £500 and £1,000 but this will certainly need a lot of work. A usable car might

turn up for £2,500 but expect to pay up to £4,000 for a prime car.

The MGB GT V8 falls into a different category in that there probably aren't that many basket cases for sale. You might be able to pick up an abandoned rebuild project for under £1,000 but you will need £1,200-£1,500 for even the roughest of runners and top dollar could well be £4,000. A good example should be on offer at around £3,000 to £3,500.

Fewer than 3,000 TR5s were made compared with 94,619 TR6s so it is hardly surprising that few are offered for sale in any condition, and it is hard to see any price pattern. A good TR6 which has been carefully

maintained or extensively restored can be expected to fetch around £2,800-£3,000 but higher prices are asked for the TR5 in similar condition. There is no shortage of TR6s requiring a lot of work and these come on to the market at anything from a few hundred pounds to just under £2,000.

The 100/6, with none of the appeal of either the 100 or the Austin Healey 3000, is still out on a limb to some extent among enthusiasts - which therefore means that bargains can occur. The latest Healeys with their wind up windows are the most valuable of the breed and a top car might raise £6,000. You might just find a rough one for under £1,000.

Production of the Marcos between 1964

DRIVING IMPRESSIONS

Michael says that his MGA is too large and too heavy for its engine size, particularly when compared to the contemporary Austin Healey and Triumph TR. The Twin Cam will go very well if properly built and maintained but that, he says, is a minor exception.

Road holding and handling of the MGA were outstandingly good for its day and when the dampers and the front suspension are right it is a car which inspires tremendous confidence whatever the conditions. The MGA driver can compensate for the lack of performance by using the excellent stability and predictability of the MGA to put up some surprisingly high average speeds without having to be a genius at the wheel.

The MGB GT V8 is an extremely rapid car. In practice, there is very little difference between a V8 and an E-Type up to about 80mph though, in a straight line, the E-Type is just getting into its stride at this speed. There is still the harsh ride of the MGB with all that car's virtues and drawbacks - but

with enough power to make the car interesting, there is more power than for instance the Big Healey could muster and the V8 is very much more civilised.

John Williams was not impressed by the *Practical Classics* TR4A and thought that it lacked some refinement and smoothness and gave a harsh ride when compared with (say) a good MGB (but he concedes that ours may not have been a particularly good TR4A). He feels that these shortcomings could not be overcome by fitting the 2½ litre engine although this particular combination did add up to a very fast Triumph.

The increased power (148bhp) of the last Austin Healey 3000s more than made up for their increased weight - in fact, says Paul, they still make a practical, everyday car in the eighties, but then all the Healeys have withstood time very well and can be driven with enjoyment in today's conditions.

The 100 feels lighter on its wheels than the three litre cars, but does not have the still impressive punch of the 3000. All the var-

iants (notwithstanding the image created by famous rally drivers like Timo Makinen during the successful Healey rally years) are prone to quite heavy understeer rather than tail-out antics if a corner is entered too rapidly because of that big, heavy engine mounted right up at the front.

Sports cars are supposed to be low and to have long bonnets. The lowest (at 3ft 6½ins) must be the Marcos and that bonnet seems awfully long to the novice pilot. If you have tried the relaxed three litre Ford V6 engined car first, a V4 or 1600 engined car might seem a bit fussy in comparison. Intrusive transmission tunnels are the norm on sports cars but the Marcos must take the prize in this section as well. In overdrive top, the three litre car will return a very high average speed for a day's driving.

A good Jensen Healey will be a very swift car indeed. The Lotus engine revs freely up to around 7,000 even if it is a bit noisy. The car was designed for the Americans which probably accounts for the ride, which is

SO WHICH IS BEST?

If you go by the price tag, then it has to be a Morgan, perhaps a late model Plus 8 with the smooth changing four speed Rover box (1972-76)? The performance per pound best deal might be the carefully negotiated Jensen Healey but that could just as easily turn out to be the most expensive mistake. The best

ready-for-the-road deal could be a TR6 which is beginning to look tired but has a good service history. If you are looking for an open topped car for a few months summer hacking followed by a winter rebuild, what about an Elan?

You must have noticed that, as last month,

each member of the writing team has a different opinion about which car is best - the editor, having got the X1/9 off his chest is now harping on about the Marcos - but we still have a month to go, perhaps we'll all agree in the July issue!

but the price of pure Lotus parts has long been a bone of contention among enthusiasts.

The Morgan is exceptionally well served by the factory which can still supply chassis, timber frame (parts or complete) and all panels for post-53 cars. Engines should present no problems but owners of cars with the Moss gearbox might find spares a little difficult as that company ceased production some time ago. A really bad Moss box can be replaced by another type. It is also said that there is difficulty in locating spares for pretty well every Morgan back axle made until fairly recent times.



A good Lotus engine makes for a very fast Jensen Healey and several are being used on the race tracks this year.

and 1972 barely scraped into four figures but examples in varying conditions do come onto the market from time to time. A really scruffy and tired car might have a price tag of well under £1,000 but a very nice car could be found for between £2,000 and £3,000. Once you get to the £4,000 mark, buyers should consider the economics of buying new.

The Jensen Healey reputation has kept prices down. We might all know that it is a very good car really, but who is going to pay more than £500 for a rough one? We would expect a very sound car for £2,000 and £3,000 should buy the best on offer – but make extra sure that the car genuinely is that good.

An original, low-mileage Elan Sprint

drophead (the most sought-after model) could be tagged at £6,000, or you might find a nice Elan + 2 for say £2,500 but either way you must be certain of the condition of the car and that, primarily, means the chassis. A car which obviously needs work might theoretically be available for £800 or so, but supply and demand could make a rough car worth £1,500.

The price prize this month goes to the Morgan. The very best could just reach £7,000 with certainly £4,000 being needed to find an average sort of car. Even death watch beetle will only bring the price down to around £2,000!

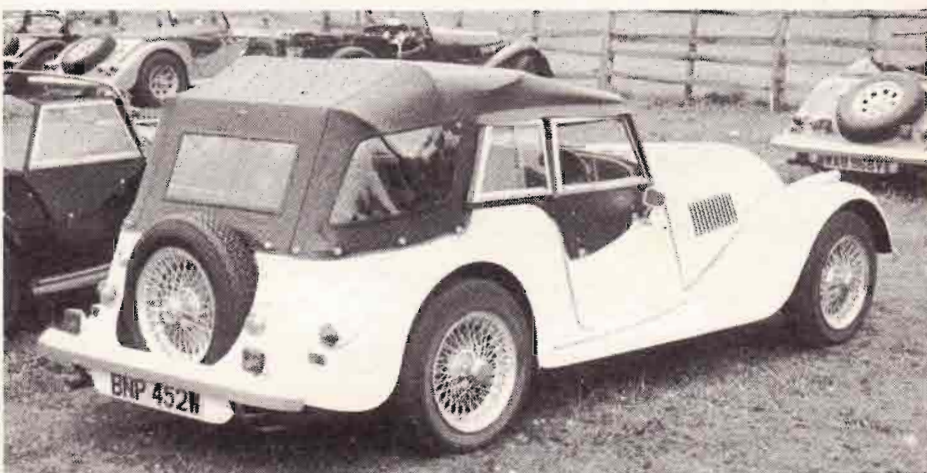


Finding a usable TR6 could be a fairly easy task. Finding a really good one will be harder.

probably the softest of the cars in this selection. It does, by the same token, offer a high degree of comfort and an equally high level of trim.

As something of a contrast, the early Elans with their 'boxwood' dash panels, tin-plate door handles and horrible window lifters provided scope for improvement on what was, even then, an expensive car. On the road, the Elan is a very quick car, not merely because its straight line performance is so good, but because its roadholding is outstanding. Only in terms of its overall dimensions can it be considered a small car and, as a former E-Type owner, John Williams remembers that the Elan was one of the very few British cars which could (and usually did) offer any challenge.

Some Morgans are indecently rapid, others are merely fast and while a few verge on ponderous, all offer the driver a traditional, almost vintage, ride and degree of comfort (although later models offered some improvement). The grip is said to be tena-



Morgans might have the biggest price tags, but most will be in need of some reconstruction.

cious on bends but many road testers would agree that the car can be skittish over the bumps.



The Elan must rate as the best bet as a rebuild project.

THE CLUBS

Two major clubs look after the interests of MGA and MGB GT V8 owners. They are the **MG Owners Club**, FREEPOST, Station Road, Swavesey, Cambs, and the **MG Car Club** at 67 Wide Bargate, Boston, Lincs.

There are at least two clubs catering for TRs

and they include the **TR Register**, which can be contacted through Val Simpson, 271 High Street, Berkhamsted, Herts, and the **TR Drivers' Club**, for whom enquiries are dealt with by K. Webb, 21 Bowcombe Ingleside, Netley Abbey, Southampton, Hants.

The Austin Healeys are catered for by the **Austin Healey Club** and the person to contact is