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New MG3 – Road Test

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The latest MG3...

...Tried and tested by Chris Adamson.

If you are in the market for a sophisticated, sporting and aspirational modern hatchback then here is a recommendation - don't even start considering the new MG3.

However, if you want a budget priced, economical to run and spacious five-door then the new Chinese built MG3 could be just the answer.

Wrapped-up in an acceptable if not entirely inspirational package, the new MG3 has lots



going for it for motorists who can look beyond the badge and erase the memory of the days when British Leyland controlled the MG marque.

Although billed as the New MG3, anyone who ever took time to study the previous generation will quickly spot that most of it is in fact the old MG3.

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Cleverly the designers at Longbridge (yes it's designed here although now entirely built in China) have re-worked the front to graft on many of the characteristics of the stylish ZS (MG's compact SUV) including the large honeycomb black grille (trimmed in chrome) and huge air intakes which give it greater road presence than its predecessor.

At the back, the designers have used an old trick of switching around the lights within the same physical package so that it looks different and quite distinctive from the rear.

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During my ten days in charge of the New MG3, something like 100 fellow MG owners saw it and not one objected to the looks; in fact several thought it rather fetching and the appearance alone was enough for them to start taking it seriously.



The contemporary feel of the panel work complements the practicality of this hatch-back; in fact it's the new MG3's ace card, being probably the most spacious model in its sector.

Wide doors, low sills and a long interior make the most of the five-seat cabin accommodation where rear occupants get masses of leg and head room. I had passengers telling me I could use the full travel of the driver's seat (which I didn't need to get comfortable) and even then they weren't restricted.

On paper the boot is one of the biggest in its class, but after a week of loading the supermarket shop and a visit to a DIY store I discovered a few design restrictions.



Yes, the luggage compartment space is deep and at 285 litres (10.06 cu.ft) very competitive (in part due to not carrying a spare wheel) but fitting in bulkier objects such as boxes can be a case of the Krypton Factor.

The combination of a sloping rear screen and reclined position of the rear seats, along with the protruding supports for the parcel shelf, mean that the access over a high sill tapers upwards and to get wide objects in requires temporarily reclining the seats.

For bulkier objects you are going to have to drop down the 60/40 split rear seats – a quick and easy task but disappointingly the emphasis on well-padded seats means they don't fold away completely flat, leaving a significant step up in the fully open load area that is now able to swallow a class-leading 1,262 litres (44.57 cu.ft).

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The supportive seating (on the Exclusive these are described as sports seats but are far more comfortable than the name suggests) is part of a mixed bag when it comes to interior furnishings. MG has yet to make a model with premium grade fixtures and fittings and, in this case, the use of an odd mix of materials and textures featuring three different layers on the dashboard (including fake carbon fibre and a curious tartan etched aluminium) doesn't quite work.

When it comes to the equipment specification I am going to admit that I am not a great fan of high tech gadgets, some I find invaluable but, most, unnecessary distractions, so the centrally mounted touch screen on the New MG3 was going to be a bit of a challenge.

Surprisingly I quickly adapted to it and found it among the simplest to operate, although having some controls duplicated on the multi-function steering wheel seems a bit of overkill – it's not as if it's a huge stretch to reach the touch screen.

One function that is welcomed on the steering wheel is cruise control which is conveniently located for quick operation.



The powerful and effective air conditioning and trip computer were child's play to operate. Being a traditional news hack I prefer to listen to news and current affairs radio programmes so the Apple CarPlay was an obsolete function as far as I am concerned - but I will accept that for some drivers, particularly the younger generation, this is going to be a must-have as is the Bluetooth connection.

Of far better use on the top trim Exclusive is the rear view camera allied to rear parking sensors, which is almost a necessity due to the lack of over the shoulder visibility in the rear three-quarter position and the rather small rear screen. Where I found a disparity was the lack of front parking sensors - a curious omission.

The eight-inch multi-function colour display screen did become slightly annoying however, in reminding me every day that the tyre pressure monitoring system was malfunctioning.

On first turn of the key the warning light came up and scrolling through the screen the monitoring system showed zero pressure in one of the wheels - a quick visual examination (followed by the use of a hand-held digital tyre pressure gauge) determined that the tyre was, despite what the screen was telling me, fully inflated.

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A visit to the very helpful local MG dealership confirmed my own assumption that the system was at fault, not the tyre and it was perfectly safe to continue driving.

On the Road

I started this report by warning that the New MG3 is not the sportiest option out there and this is emphasised by the normally aspirated four-cylinder 1.5 litre DOHC petrol engine delivering a rather meek maximum output of 106 PS at 6,000 rpm - it's the only power unit on offer at the moment.



While not being the most aggressive performer it does go about its business in a quiet unflustered fashion and feels like it will run all day long without a problem.

Sluggish to get going (60 mph taking over 10 seconds), its best characteristic is when up and running and pushing over 3,000 rpm when the power delivery (helped by maximum torque arriving at 4,700 rpm) is a lot more enthusiastic, giving it acceptable, if not spectacular, overtaking ability.

MG has fitted an economy mode to help keep fuel consumption in check. Its primary feature is an automatic stop-start function when stationary in traffic. While this seems



simple the brains need the engine to get up to a high operating temperature before it comes in and short urban journeys aren't really sufficient.

I only managed to activate it on a few occasions and as a result MG's suggestion that 47.1 mpg is possible was well out of reach. During my tenure, on a series of short and medium distance daily drives, I recorded a rather disappointing 32.7 mpg average.

The use of a rather basic five-speed manual transmission (no automatic alternative) doesn't help the economy (a sixth gear would help at higher speeds) and, while the gearbox can feel a little sloppy at times with a long throw between cogs, the light clutch makes it easy to use.

It's a similar story with the braking and steering which are both light but progressive and best appreciated at low speeds when manoeuvring in tight confines, especially parking where the 10.4 metre turning circle is much appreciated.

At speed the assisted steering doesn't lose definition and I was pleasantly surprised that over some of the worst road surfaces in Britain the handling wasn't seriously disturbed and didn't require lots of correction to the wheel.

Passengers also commented on the generally good ride quality of the New MG3, although the relatively short 2.5 metres (8.20 feet) wheelbase and traditional McPherson strut front and torsion beam rear suspension does mean that at times it does thump in an out of potholes and over very rough surfaces.

The installation of selectable electronic stability control, corner brake control and traction control as standard gives reassurance that you really can't feel or appreciate in normal driving conditions, but knowing it is there when you need it does give a driver confidence.



VERDICT

Many people seem quick to dismiss the New MG3 as just a very mild facelift offering nothing new to the five-door hatchback customer - but, to my mind, they are overlooking the most significant aspect of this model...its seven year/80,000 mile warranty.

We all know that a new vehicle is going to slump in value the moment it is driven out of the showroom and will keep on tumbling until it is only fit for scrap.

However, at a starting price of under £13,000 for even the top spec model, Group 8E on



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insurance and £205 for the Road Fund Licence, the New MG3 is pretty good value for what you get, even with that depreciation looming. Knowing that you can hopefully keep it running for seven years without worrying sweetens the pill for any budget-conscious family.



Wheels-Alive Tech Spec. in Brief:

New MG3 Exclusive

Engine: 1498cc DOHC VTI-tech

Transmission: Five-speed manual



Power: 106 PS @ 6,000 rpm

Torque: 137 Nm (101 lb.ft) @ 4,750 rpm

Performance:

0-62 mph: 10.5 seconds

Top Speed: 108 mph

Fuel Consumption (Official Figures):

Urban: 38.9 mpg

Extra-Urban: 53.8 mpg

Combined: 47.1 mpg

As tested: 32.7 mpg

CO2 Emissions: 140 g/km

Price (On the Road): £12,795