All-electric MG ZS – Road Test

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MG ZS EV Exclusive all-electric compact SUV.

By Robin Roberts (and Miles Better News Agency).

From its conception almost a century ago, MG stood out as a performance brand on a shoestring and that simple value endures today with a modern twist.

In the 1920s, Morris Garages cars tuned versions of standard family models and today the Chinese-owned MG marque sells family cars but has been one of the first to offer the latest pure electric versions at down to earth prices when compared to many rivals.

It has become a very successful brand over the last three years, thanks to an expanding

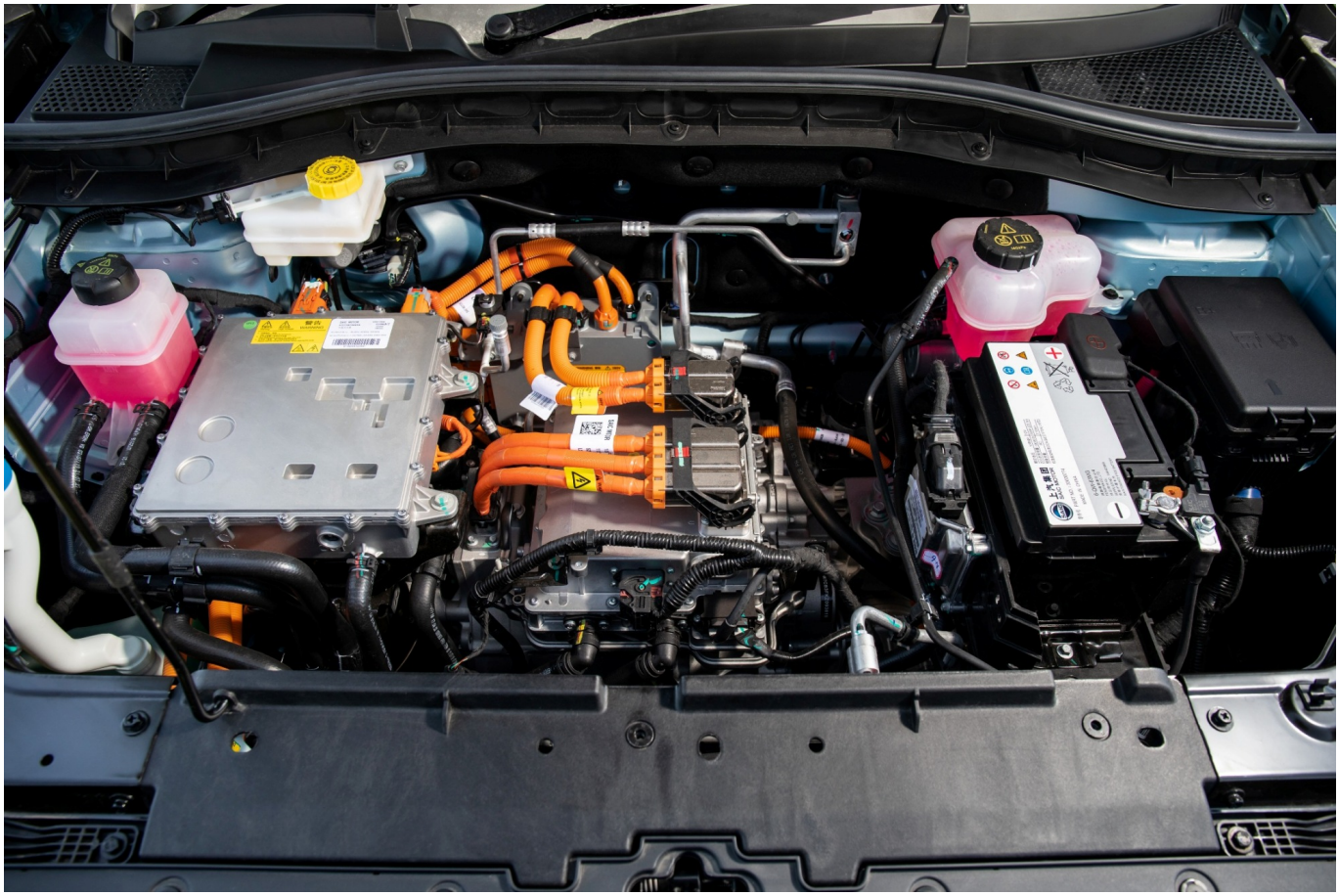
network of UK dealers, and it has built on that good-feel family relationship. It has just introduced some very attractive finance deals to help dealers and buyers recover from the devastating effects of the Coronavirus epidemic which has swept across the country.

Daniel Gregorious, Head of Sales & Marketing at MG Motor UK said, “We’re delighted to be launching our strongest ever new car offers and we hope that potential customers will see the tremendous value-for-money that MGs offer.

“Our Peace of Mind Promise on the ZS EV all electric compact SUV provides customers with a comprehensive value-for-money package, making the switch to zero emissions motoring easier than ever. There’s never been a better time to switch to an electric MG, and our dealers across the UK are ready to help customers adapt to the new electric norm”.

The flagship SUV sports the MG Pilot advanced driver assistance system, 18” diamond cut alloy wheels and a 10.1” colour touchscreen with integrated satellite navigation, Apple CarPlay and Android Auto and comes with Euro NCAP’s Five Star safety rating.

The current MG ZS range of nine models actually comprises two petrol engines, 111 hp 1.0 and 106 hp 1.5 litre units with automatic or manual gearboxes, plus two differently trimmed fully electric versions sharing the same 143 hp electric motor. Trim difference for £2,500 between them relate to fabric or synthetic upholstery with manual or automatic climate control air conditioning, sat-nav and reversing camera.



To anyone unfamiliar with an MG EV the starting is straightforward enough after you get in. Push the fascia button – it's as simple as that because you don't have to insert a key – and after a couple of seconds when the car's systems automatically check functions, a 'Ready' light illuminates and you are ready to go.

A rotary switch allows you to move from neutral to drive or reverse, the self-parking brake releases as throttle is depressed, you silently roll away and it is silent, which can be strange at first. You hear tyres rolling over the surface but that's about it. Accelerate and there is no rising exhaust note because there is no exhaust and only the audible note of the tyres changes with increasing effortless speed.

The in-car computerised data system can be changed to show a variety of powertain functions including energy stored and used, distance travelled or to needing recharging,

and even a useful tyre pressure indicator to monitor any leaks or deflation. Speedometer is traditional, well marked and clear to read and matched to an energy gauge showing charging rate or power demand.

You can vary the car's responses by a console Mode button for eco, normal or sport and that determines how the MG ZS reacts to throttle pressure, there's also a button to vary the amount of regenerative braking through three settings to aid mileage extension, while a third displays the battery state. Plug in point is behind the grille's Octagon badge and in car a display shows the percentage of charge and generated range based on recent past demand.

The central console displays infotainment, mechanical settings and on the top model the navigation with some touch screen features, while a simple range of buttons and rotary

knobs below the screen operated the air conditioning and climate control. All very simple and effective.

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Driving the MG ZS EV is straightforward, the acceleration is very good and deceptively brisk because it's near silent, there is no gear change to introduce hesitation and the brakes are very strong even on the mildest retardation setting, while the steering has a good turning circle and weight to give satisfying feedback without any vibration.

Ride can be jiggly over some surfaces but generally it absorbed potholes and ridges without complaint, it had little body roll and gripped the surface with confidence while not dipping or pitching under hard braking or acceleration. Noises were mostly confined to tyre rumbles with low wind wuffle but no other mechanical sources.

Secondary controls were generally grouped on two lights and wipers stalks with a third out of sight behind the wheel-spoke for the intelligent cruise control, which I did not like as it seemed far too sensitive and I found the lane change gongs and similar alerts for doors open and unfastened seat-belts were too loud even after setting them on a lower volume.

Despite the slightly firm nature of the suspension, the ride was comfortable thanks in the main to the excellent soft yet supporting seats throughout, with a good adjustment range in front, a generally roomy cabin with good access and also an easy to load/ unload boot. There's no spare tyre, just a puncture kit, which can be inconvenient. The well under the floor also houses the high and low voltage charging cables which neatly pack away.

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Although having a high definition reversing camera on our top spec model there were some blindspots behind the roof's thick pillars and around the front of the car so care was needed when parking and manoeuvring.

Fuel consumption is interesting. A full charge will give it up to 231 miles at modest speed but overall it is tested on the WLTP cycle to 163 miles and its efficiency is rated as taking 18.6 KW hours of charge for each 62 miles of range and in use it's fully charged overnight. We found that it typically took a four-hours charge on a domestic circuit to give enough for an 80 miles range so most average commuting would be done with one or two full charges a week, and much sooner with a higher voltage charge point at home or work, or a public point where available.

There are a number of apps to download onto phones to work out a charging route for a journey but you have to consider where and when you can do so and build in journey time for these stops, ideally when you need to eat or remotely work.

VERDICT

Living with an electric car is not difficult, but it demands a different approach to your habits of a lifetime behind the wheel and a little bit of forward planning. With the MG ZS EV you are certainly not sacrificing creature comforts for any real inconvenience but you actually can gain more than you think possible and you're helping create a cleaner world for future generations.

For: Silent and very smooth powertrain, good responses, very strong braking action, direct steering, clear instruments with excellent reversing camera, comfortable seats, plenty of accessory plugs, easy to load boot, attractive cabin details, long warranty, affordable.

Against: Unsettled ride, noisy suspension and tyre rumbles, sensitive cruise control, some blind spots and very noisy alerts.

Mini Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

MG ZS Exclusive all-electric compact SUV

Price: £27,995 (after the £3,000 Plug-in Car Grant)

Mechanical: 143 hp/105 kw motor with water-cooled lithium-ion battery, automatic

Performance: 87 mph, 0–62 mph 8.5 seconds

Combined MPG: 18.6 KW hours per 62 miles, CO2: ZERO g/km

Taxation costs: Bik rating: Zero %, VED road tax £0FY, £0SR

Insurance Group: 21A

Warranty: Seven years/80,000 miles

Sizes: L 4.32 m (14.17 ft), W 1.81 m (5.94 ft), H 1.65 m (5.41 ft), five doors/five seats

Boot space: 448 to 1,375 litres (15.82 to 48.56 cu.ft)

Late News:

David Miles writes; since my colleague Robin Roberts wrote this road test MG has been voted the Best Value Brand 2020 in the UK at the Auto Trader New Car Awards where over 181,000 new car buyers had their say on the best cars for sale. MG also finished in the top three for Best Value New Car for the MG ZS EV and for the Most Loved Brand class.

In addition MG has announced that the MG ZS petrol powered SUV gets an uplift in specification and will be on sale from 1 July 2020. At the moment MG only lists the revised petrol ZS range with a 1.5 litre engine and a manual transmission but an auto option is due later. Prices start from £15,495. No mention of any changes for the MG ZS EV version tested here.

MG 77 EV