MG HS – First Impressions

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Chris Adamson test drives the range topping MG HS

(All words and photographs by Chris).

Having come rather late to the Sports Utility party MG is now making up lost ground by launching its third model, the new flagship HS which, in effect, takes over from the GS now this original SUV is out of stock here in the UK.

Like the rest of the MG line-up, the HS is being promoted as being bigger and better equipped for less money than its designated rivals so will be going head-to-head in the C-segment with the likes of the Nissan Qashqai, Mazda CX-5 and Kia Sportage.

Making an SUV stand out from the crowd in this sector is very difficult and MG isn’t the only one not to have quite succeeded.

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Pleasant and inoffensive as it is, the HS lacks individuality and personality. There has been an attempt to give it impact with the largest ever MG grille and front badge but this just makes it look heavy and rather ungainly, while chrome highlights give a more upmarket impression.

Rather featureless side panels give it a homogenous effect while the broad rear haunches, twin tail pipes and aluminium lower bumper are there to give it an athletic stance but only serve to suggest it is rear rather than front-wheel drive.

Big doors open into an interior that is spacious and more than capable of carrying five fully grown adults, with a nice entry height and a good driving position. Passengers all-round get lots of leg and head room plus a rear drop-down central arm-rest (with storage compartment) while an airy feeling comes from the huge opening panoramic skyroof first seen on the ZS EV.

MGs always seem to do well in the luggage-carrying stakes and the HS continues this with a generous 463 litre (16.35 cu.ft) boot (disappointingly with only a one-position floor) while the 60/40 split rear seats have a three position reclining function and fold down near flat to expand its load carrying possibilities.

MG executives, stung by complaints about the rather hard interior surfaces of its existing models, are emphasising the ‘soft’ materials that abound in the cabin – which comes in either an all-black or a lurid red and black combination.

This is true, but then the designers have gone and used a multitude of different materials which all gets a bit distracting. For example on the dashboard there are at least three different horizontally arranged surfaces from hard plastics down below to a bulbous spongey section in the middle (which serves no real purpose) and a soft top player – that’s before you add in pieces of brushed aluminium, stitched leather and huge turbine air vents.

The attempt to soften the interior has to be applauded but, for my taste, it is just a bit too busy.

The same goes for the curious digital instrument display behind the reach and rake adjustable steering wheel.

It’s packed with information but almost cuts the outer analogue style images in half and to see a rev counter going anti-clockwise is a little un-nerving and, with a nice clear digital speed reading front and centre, the dial operated speedometer is almost redundant.

The huge 10inch central infotainment display panel for controlling many of the on-board

functions such as the air conditioning and audio operated by the now very fashionable piano keys, rather dominates and, like many others in the market, looks like an iPad has been welded into the dashboard. This might be fine for the younger generation but MG's likely target market of more mature motorists might feel intimidated and discover their integration skills a little lacking.

The HS comes in three trim levels which, when stacked up against the opposition, are all generously equipped featuring MG Pilot as standard.

This is loaded with electronic wizardry such as Autonomous Emergency Braking, Adaptive Cruise Control for the auto version (which can be useful on the motorway), Lane Keeping Assist (occasionally intrusive), Intelligent Speed limit Assist, Intelligent headlight Control (another useful feature), Traffic Jam Assist (DCT versions only), Rear Cross Traffic Alert, Blink Spot Detection and Door Opening Warning.

Priced at £17,995 (around £2,000 cheaper than its closest rival) the entry level Explore (only available with manual transmission) includes 17inch alloy wheels, keyless entry and push button start, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, Bluetooth connection, air conditioning and electric folding and heated door mirrors.

Mid-level specification is the Excite starting at £20,495 for the manual and £21,995 for the auto which adds in a rear parking sensors camera, 18inch alloy wheels, rain sensing wipers and satellite navigation.

Top of the range and expected best seller the Exclusive (£22,995 manual and £24,495 auto) is loaded up with the choice of two leather interiors, front and rear LED sequential indicators, electrically adjustable and heated one-piece sport front seats, dual zone climate control, selectable ambient lighting and that opening skyroof.

On the Road

For the lone engine available in the HS, MG sticks with another incarnation of its

Longbridge designed and developed 1.5 litre turbo-charged petrol engine, this time pumping out 162 bhp – slightly down on the previous GS due to emissions regulations.

Still this is plenty to get the HS underway without any delay thanks to the unit developing a healthy 250 Nm (184 lb.ft) of torque available from 1,500 rpm to 4,400 rpm, although the just sub 10 second sprint time is not outstanding, and slower than the GS.

The six-speed manual transmission is expected to be the choice of the majority of purchasers (in part because of the cost) and is efficient and easy to use with the torque punchy enough to throw in a kick of power when needed or happily cruise along in top gear on the motorway.

The alternative seven-speed DCT automatic (carrying a £1,500 premium) has the choice of four driving models: Economy, Normal, Custom and Sport (which can be engaged using a Supersport button on the steering wheel which, at the same time, activates the red ambient interior lighting).

You certainly notice a difference between the modes with Sport providing the grunt for a responsive kick-down for overtaking, while Economy restricts hard acceleration to conserve fuel.

The automatic also features steering wheel paddle shifts for those who want to play around with the gears, especially useful if planning a brisk piece of motoring.

Slightly disappointing are the brakes which feel a little soft meaning you need to keep applying the pressure to be sure of maximum application.

The assisted steering also has a slightly curious sensation of firming-up on tight cornering so giving a variable degree of feed-back which, at times, I felt was working against me.

No complaints however about the ride quality through the McPherson strut front and multi-link rear suspension, which is generally very good and provides occupants with a nicely balanced travelling experience.

There is a noticeable stiff rebound on the suspension which is great on flat surfaces but can be a bit rough when bumping into and out of deep potholes.

MG is making no great claims for fuel economy or emissions for the HS, both are very average – that will come next year when they launch the 49 kg emissions plug-in hybrid HS – a car that could just become the best buy MG ever.

Verdict

While the GS was restricted to just 1,000 units a year the HS is expected to triple and even quadruple this number as MG continues its year-on-year sales boom.

Having made great inroads into the sector with the well-received ZS, the HS should be easily capable of achieving this as the MG dealer network reaches 100 outlets.

It is a likeable, well equipped and efficient if unspectacular SUV at competitive prices offering a touch more space than the ZS and, of course, like the ZS it comes with the very

attractive seven year warranty.

Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

MG HS

Engine: 1,490cc GDI Turbocharged

Transmission: Six-speed manual / Seven-speed Automatic

Power: 162 PS @ 5,500 rpm

Torque: 250 Nm (184 lb.ft) @ 1,500–4,500rpm

Performance:

0–62 mph: 9.9 seconds

Top Speed: 118 mph

Fuel Consumption (WLTP Figures):

Combined: 37.2 mpg (manual) / 36.2 mpg auto)

CO2 Emissions: 148 g/km

Price (On the Road), from: £17,995