MG HS – Road Test

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Chris Adamson puts MG's family SUV through its paces...

(All words and photographs by Chris).

Average is often seen as a negative description, certainly when applied to vehicle performance, but I have discovered that it can actually be a virtue.

I have come to this conclusion after spending 10 days with the new MG HS, a family-sized sports utility that makes no claims for being the fastest, most economical, most comfortable or the best equipped in its class but still manages to please in almost everything it does.

With no great pre-conceptions, the HS doesn't have to try hard to win you over, it just seems to do most things very competently and without disappointment so that it very quickly becomes like an old and comfortable companion.

This starts from the moment you look at it. In proportion the HS could be one of many SUVs out there, nothing in the design shouts outrage, even the largest ever MG grille doesn't seem out of proportion and blends neatly into the overall concept.



With its wide flat bonnet, big door mirrors and athletic haunches it fits the profile of many of its competitors. If I could make a few nips and tucks it would be lowering the boot sill a fraction and finding a way to reduce the size of the C pillar which does restrict some of the rear three-quarter visibility.

One feature I particularly appreciated, after an especially damp and dismal journey, was the wrap-under doors that prevent the sills from getting caked in mud and then deposited on the backs of legs as you step out.



In contrast the forward-facing detection camera, used for several of the automatic safety functions, appears vulnerable to being blocked by road grime – as indicated by warnings on the instrument panel.

If you want your car to stand out in the crowd and proclaim its driver as a bold individual then look elsewhere, but if you want something that is easy on the eye and functional then put the HS on your short list.

Move inside and things I admit are a little different, especially in the range-topping Exclusive grade when trimmed with the red ‘leather’ package.

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Clearly hurt by criticism of its low end choice of cabin materials on previous models, MG has made great efforts to use more substantial fabrics and plastics and it clearly shows.

MG owning friends who viewed the HS were very impressed by the fit and finish and most commented that the HS has the feel of a more up-market model and this is certainly the case on the Exclusive with its stitched leather effect.

Despite the integrated head rests, that give the Exclusive a sports car effect, the seats prove to be surprisingly comfortable, supportive without getting too body hugging as some sports seats can. Add to this the electric operation and integrated heating and the front seats are very welcoming on a cold morning.

Ahead the low dashboard, covered in a good selection of horizontally arranged textured materials, allows for excellent forward vision.

Alongside this, the large circular retro air vents smack of the 70s and were never an MG feature, but they aren’t too off-putting and actually have some nostalgic charm of their own.

In contrast, the busy instrument panel with its mix of digital and analogue read-outs is very cluttered. You can personalise the display, which is useful but, for my preference, it still tries to throw too much information at you in one panel and the anticlockwise rev counter is frankly bizarre.

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There is even more information to take in and navigate with the large central screen which operates many of the on-board functions such as the heating, audio and satellite navigation

systems.

Its raised position and rectangular shape will be very familiar to the iPad generation and even for someone born before the computer age it is eventually quick and easy to master.

No complaints from anyone about the cabin space and I carried four people on a regular basis with the boot filled to the brim.

Rear occupants mentioned the expansive amount of leg room and enjoyed the luxury of a central arm-rest while the head room was adequate if not overly generous.

The overall feeling of space is enhanced by the huge two section panoramic sun roof that floods the interior with light – something you need on a dull and dreary day.

One feature I considered a gimmick when I drove the HS on the original press launch was the ambient interior lighting but, when you have this available at night, you suddenly see what all the fuss is about. Not only does the red lighting add a touch of warmth it also makes reaching objects in the car a lot easier.

I am a car owner who tends to use their vehicle for a wide variety of purposes and that can include a big shopping trip to the DIY store or a visit to the local civic amenity tip, so for me, and I suspect many families, the versatility of the interior layout is a vital feature – and here the HS gets high marks.

The 60/40 multi-position reclining split rear seats fold as near as flat as you could ask for in a trice and create a vast load space. The already sizeable boot (463 litres or 16.35 cu.ft – which is better than many of its rivals) is almost quadrupled in size with the seats down.

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One disappointment is that the load floor has just one position. Lift it up and it exposes a multi sectional storage compartment which I doubt few owners will fill and below that a void

containing the run flat system. No spare wheel as standard.

I am a very vocal advocate of always carrying a spare wheel (due to having had wheels on two different vehicles severely distorted by hitting road debris and pot holes at speed rendering re-inflation impossible) so I would choose to purchase a spare wheel and pack any odds and ends around this, which would have allowed the load floor to be relocated slightly lower.

A better feature is the automatic opening and closing of the boot hatch – but a word of warning it can be very sensitive if someone inadvertently tries to open it manually.

When it comes to specification, the Executive trim (car manufacturers always send the press the top of the range models to test) has lots of bells and whistles (many already mentioned). The kit list also includes a six speaker audio, satellite navigation, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, rear parking sensors and camera, USB and mobile phone charging point and front and rear LED sequential indicators.

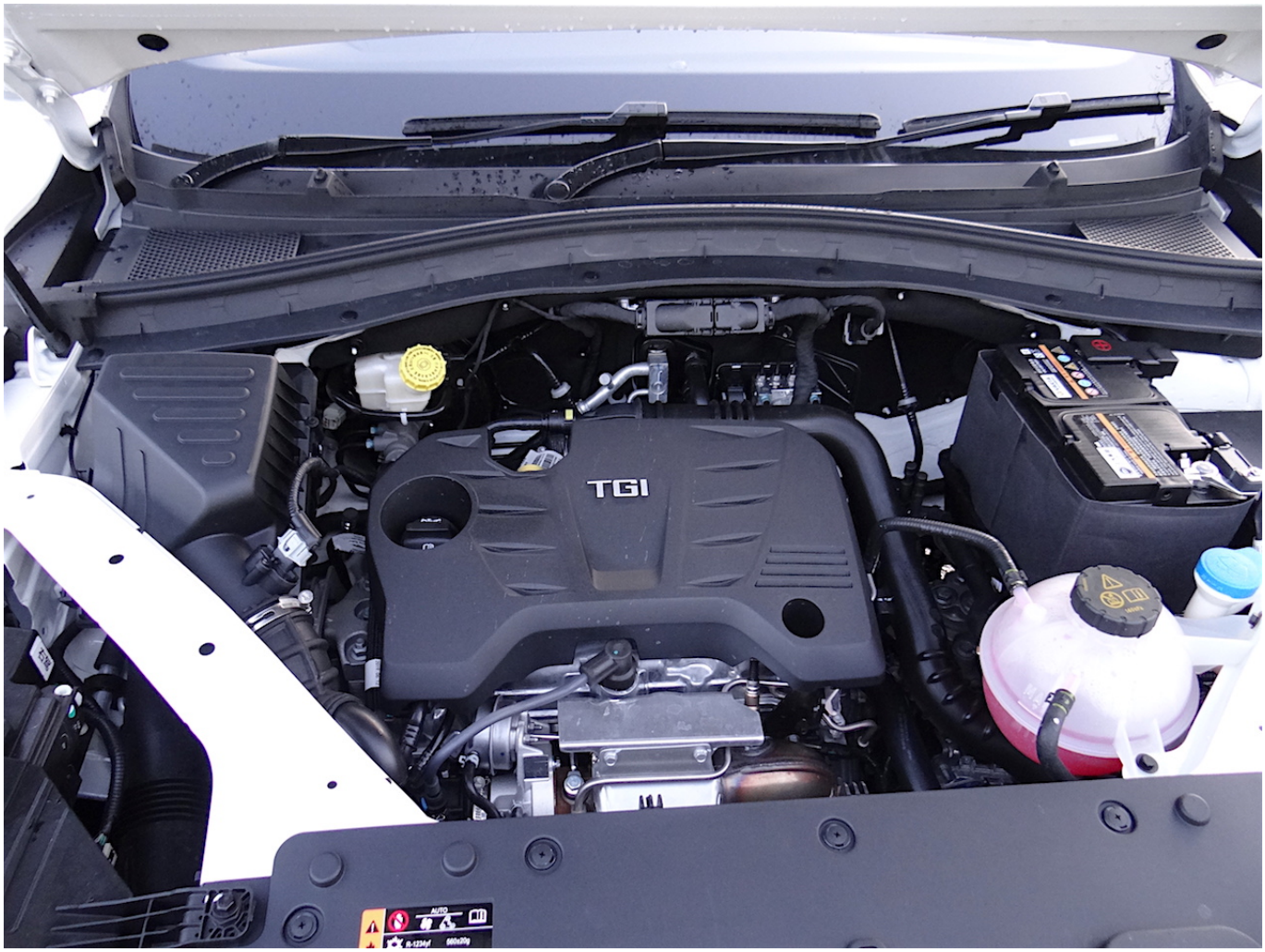
Safety and convenience features include Dual Zone Climate Control, Autonomous Emergency Braking, Adaptive Cruise Control (great for long motorway journeys), Lane Keeping Assist (often intrusive), Intelligent Speed limit Assist, Intelligent Headlight Control (a time-saver at night), Traffic Jam Assist , Rear Cross Traffic Alert and Blind Spot indicator.

With these and other design features the HS achieves the top Five Star Euro NCAP rating on safety which is a reassurance for potential buyers, although I did find some of the warnings (especially on vehicle proximity) a tad intrusive and a bit like Big Brother.

On the Road



MG enthusiasts have long chided the new Chinese owners for not giving its current showroom selection more oomph. The four-cylinder 1.5 litre Longbridge designed petrol engine has been soldiering on now in many incarnations without setting the automotive world alight.



As installed in the HS it actually puts out slightly less power than the GS model it replaces at 162 PS but this is sufficient for most applications without putting a driver in danger of getting over ambitious.

The seven-speed automatic transmission (with manual selection option and steering wheel paddle shifts) has the choice of normal, economy, sport and custom settings plus a red Super Sport button for quicker throttle responses.

This red button is very effective at allowing the quicker release of power to the front wheels, making best use of the 250 Nm (184 lb.ft) of available torque from as low as 1,500 rpm and it is going to be a great temptation, especially when brisk overtaking is required.

Less effective is the economy setting (operated via the mode selection or Eco button) which, not unexpectedly, demands gentle acceleration for maximum economy but which then appears to fight the driver when an added injection of speed is required.

Its sensitive nature is the one flaw in the HS package making for, at times, an irregular throttle response which can result in sudden peaks and troughs of acceleration. Initial acceleration needs to be finely judged with a delicate right foot after which you can be a bit more aggressive.

Even with Economy selected the HS isn't going to be the most fuel-efficient or cleanest in the class as I warned at the start. I managed to get close to the 36 mpg quoted by MG although I would advise owners to expect smoothing around 35 mpg in everyday use and 148 g/km on emissions isn't going to win any friends in the environmental lobby.

Having been slightly disappointed in the ride quality of the MG ZS I was anticipating that the HS might have similar faults but the longer wheelbase and fine tuning of the suspension seems to have worked wonders.

The ride quality is firm but not harsh and body roll, even on high speed cornering, is minimal with a good overall balance.

However, I have to report that while I found the chassis and suspension more than acceptable I did receive some feed-back from rear-seat occupants that they experienced a firmer ride than they had been expecting – which could be down to the selection of the 235/50R18 Michelin tyres.



From the driver's perspective the HS is an easy companion to handle. Some may observe that the steering is firm but that is how I prefer it and while perhaps not the sharpest at responding to the steering wheel input, it is competent and assured in all circumstances.

Around town the weighting is light enough for low speed manoeuvres and with a good lock and turning circle it's not difficult to negotiate parking spaces.


MG



VERDICT

After my extended test period with the HS I have concluded that it is the best thing that MG has made since production moved to China.

Yes it is understated (some actually might find it underwhelming) in many aspects and isn't the most sporting or most economical or most luxurious in the class but it does do everything you ask of it with a quiet reassurance.

It is very easy and quick to get comfortable with – the HS turned out to be a car I really

didn’t want to give back.

For anyone wavering about considering the HS as their next family car then can I just mention that with every extra loaded onto it the HS costs less than £25,000 – which is a good £4,000 below all its established rivals. It also comes with an industry matching seven year warranty and the expanding MG network means there should be an MG showroom near you.



Wheels-Alive Tech Spec. in Brief:

MG HS 1.5 T-GDi Exclusive DCT

Engine: 1,490cc turbocharged petrol

Transmission: Seven-speed automatic

Power: 162 PS @ 5,500 rpm

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

Performance:

0–62 mph: 9.9 seconds

Top Speed: 118 mph

Fuel Consumption:

WLTP Combined Figure: 36.2 mpg

Test consumption: 35.5 mpg

CO2 Emissions: 148 g/km

Price (On the Road): £24,495


HS