MG Sales Record – and Revisiting the MG3 in a short Road Test

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Chris Adamson looks at the continuing growth of MG, and drives the 2016 MG3

New MG registrations in the UK topped the 3,000 mark last year (2015) setting a record figure for the famous British brand since its acquisition a decade ago by Chinese car giant SAIC Motor.

This was almost 1,000 more than in 2014 and surpassed the 2013 and 2014 sales figures combined.

Driving the sales success was the five-door MG3 hatchback which accounted for 2,450 units

out of the total, demonstrating that it is making gradual, if not spectacular, in-roads into the UK's car-buying heartland.

I was among the first UK motoring journalists to drive the MG when it was launched to the press (at Bognor Regis Butlins) in July 2013 so I thought it was about time I got back behind the wheel to see if the MG3 can still make an impression in the competitive hatchback sector nearly three years on.





Visually the MG3 remains fresh and contemporary, the only change being the recent addition of a chromed grille, plus more colour and roof choices.

The deep front bib and slim-line honeycomb grille with expressive running lights, fronting a strong wedge profile with body coloured side sills and extended wheel arches, all contrive to make it look as solid and determined as ever.

MG's much promoted personalisation programme means that potentially all 2,500 of those sold last year could be different thanks to the combination of body colours and graphics.

The range-topping 3Style version I tried in Rose Red also featured a 'Hope and Glory' union flag roof, Newton black door mirrors and 16 inch black diamond alloy wheels.

The MG3 is one of the most capacious in its class; open the tall doors, and you enter a well-appointed and homely environment with just a nod to MG's sporting heritage, in touches such as the leather-trimmed steering wheel with red stitching, and red highlights around the air vents for that go-faster feeling.







For a starting price of £10,500, the 3-Style comes well-stacked with useful kit such as reverse parking sensors, cruise control, automatic headlights and windscreen wipers,

electronic air-conditioning, LED daytime running lights, Bluetooth audio streaming and telephone integration, DAB digital radio, CD player with MP3 and USB auxiliary input as well as Smartphone and iPod integration.

ON THE ROAD

At launch my main bugbear about the MG3 was the lack of performance and, although some miles on the clock of the early 2015 version I was entrusted with, had loosened things up you still need to work the DOHC VTI-TECH 1498cc litre petrol unit quite hard to get the most out of it.

Maintaining the engine speed at around 3,500 rpm seems to be the best way to ensure rapid progress through the slightly ponderous five-speed manual transmission to get anywhere close to MG's claimed sprint figure of 60 mph in 10.4 seconds.

Only offering 106 PS at a limit brushing 6,000rpm is never going to get the MG3 into hot-hatch territory where it really ought to be, but the 137 Nm (101 lb.ft) of torque at a useful 4,750 rpm does ensure some sustained acceleration in most gears.

Overlooking its outright performance, the MG3 quickly becomes an easy-to-use companion, happy to dawdle in traffic or stretch its legs at the sight of a dual-carriageway and its enthusiastic responses soon make for a relaxed and unfussy driving experience.

As remarked on by many of my colleagues, one of the MG3's best attributes is its ride quality; just enough suppleness on the McPherson strut front and torsion beam rear assemblies to cope with the vagaries of the British road surface without over-reacting.

The tall body and high riding position, which gives it that class-leading cabin space, means there is a slight tendency for the body to sway on tight cornering and the front wheel drive does induce some predictable and easily managed understeer.

Throughout there is always a sense of being in full control of the MG3 no matter what the

driving conditions; unspectacular it may be but competent it certainly is.

Practicality abounds in the MG3 from the wide opening doors and high hatch opening to the commodious 285 litre (10.0 cu.ft) boot that can be expanded to 1,262 litres (44.5 cu.ft) with the rear seats folded down.

On reflection, I suspect this, along with its affordable running costs thanks to a low insurance group, modest emissions ranking (the 2016 model year EU6 engine specification has seen CO2 drop to 124 g/km with the installation of stop-start technology), competitive servicing and close on 50 mpg, is what is really selling it to the public.

The continued expansion of the MG network around the country is also helping to raise the brand's profile and make it easier for owners to purchase and maintain their MG3s without having to travel inordinate distances.

VERDICT

Nearly three years on and the MG3 can still compete with the best in the class in most areas although I get the feeling that a re-fresh is going to be needed quite soon and I hope a little more power added to make it a more rounded and eye-catching proposition.



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MG3 3Style

Engine: 1498cc, four cylinder, twin overhead camshaft, 16 valve, normally-aspirated VTI-TECH

Transmission: Five speed manual gearbox, front wheel drive

Power: 106 PS @ 6,000 rpm

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

Performance:

0-62 mph: 10.4 sec.

Top speed: 108 mph

Fuel consumption (‘Official’ figures):

Urban: 41.7 mpg

Extra-Urban: 59.6 mpg

Combined: 51.5 mpg

CO2 emissions: 124 g/km

Price (‘On the Road’), from: £10,500