MG ZS Trophy Hybrid+ Road Test

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MG is a becoming a brand to be reckoned with and strengthening its standing in the British market by taking a step back, writes Robin Roberts (and WheelsWithinWales).

The famous octagonal badge has been seen on UK made models since 1924, but it has also been a century of change, most notably when it was saved by an unknown Chinese brand called Nanjing in 2005 and then almost immediately resold to the state owned SAIC car company.

They decided to build on the respect for MG but recognised it had to come up with some modern designs and technology to move into its second century.

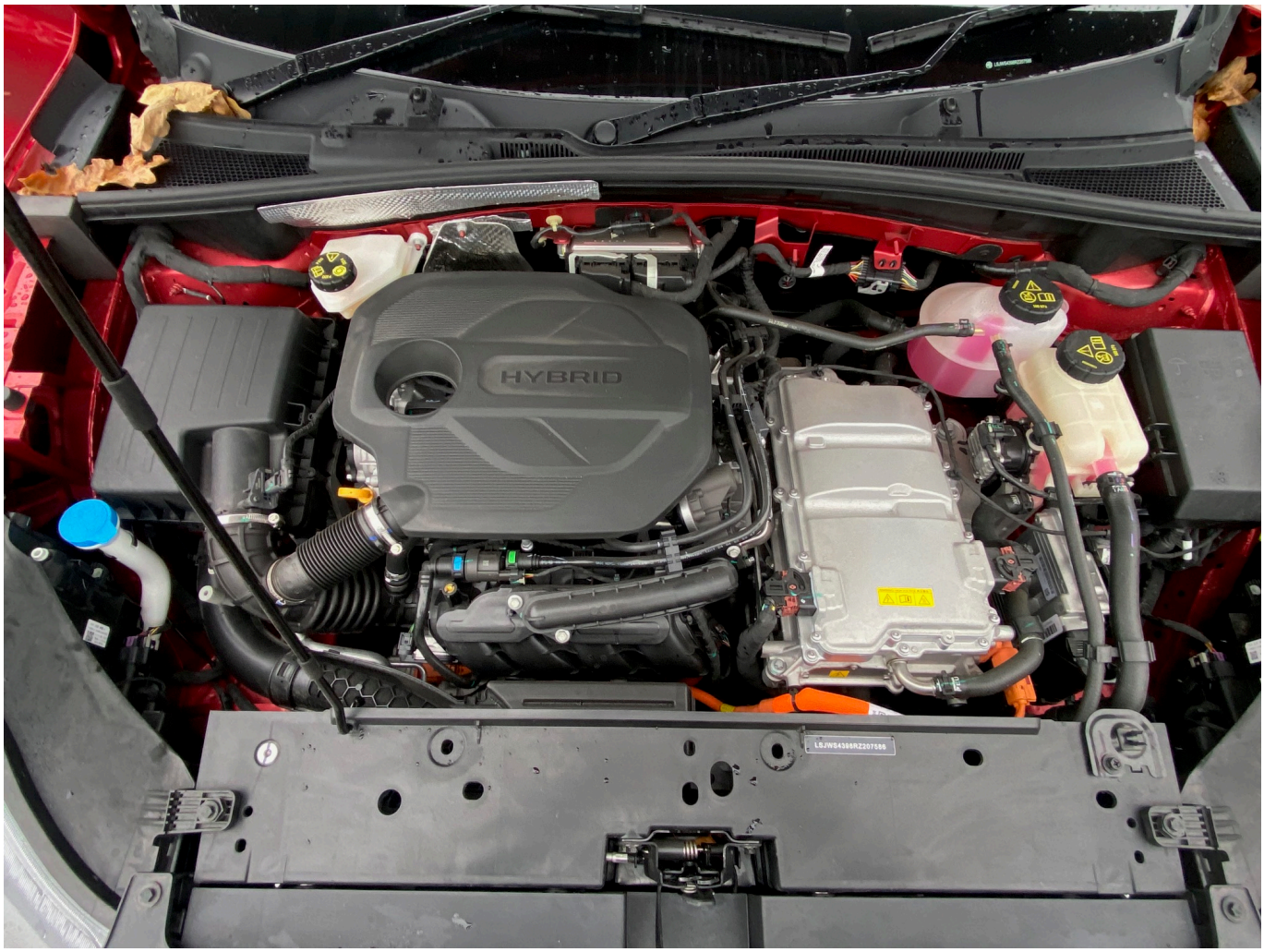
The MG ZS was their SUV designed for the popular family sector and a fully electric version put down a marker for their future intentions. About 100,000 were sold from 2017, including petrol and pure battery versions.

While its low price against rivals drove sales it was hampered by a slower moving recharging network and the public’s desire to hedge bets and go hybrid, giving them guaranteed get-me-there petrol dependability.

So the all new second generation MG ZS is a Hybrid only model in SE or Trophy trims from just under £22,000 and £24,500 respectively.

The 1.5 litre petrol engine runs alongside a 100 kW electric motor and utilises a three-speed

automatic transmission to stretch the economy and still return decent performance on the road and at the filling station.



Trophy adds niceties such as 18 instead of 17-inch wheels on the entry level SE, heated front seats and steering wheel, leather-effect seats in place of cloth, rear privacy glass and an electrically adjustable driver's seat with lumbar support – but it really needs an adjustable steering column and wheel to suit a variety of drivers.

The engine is up to its task and smooth, fairly quiet, and strongly pulls from low to mid range, but lacks punch at the top end. The choice of transmission may explain this with a

shortage of ratios to spread the torque over a wider power band.

The changes were clean and smooth however and the fuel consumption was low, helped no doubt by the car's modest weight under 1.5 tonnes.

It steered well with a good turning circle in town and when parking, plus a nice feedback on open winding roads and no vibration on motorways.

Underfoot, the brakes were smooth and strong and the parking brake did a good job on a slope.

Secondary controls were sensibly placed on and around the steering wheel and column but it would be much better if there was some adjustment in the set up to go with the excellent powered front seats.

All the seats were well shaped, deeply padded and supportive, even in the back so passengers did not drift about on bends.

The MG ZS Hybrid Trophy had a good ride as well and soaked up shocks and bumps, but you could hear the suspension working away and the 18-inch tyres bumping over bad bits of road.

Despite that, the handling was surprisingly sharp and roadholding sure-footed so you could make the most of the available power, even selecting different driving modes for conditions and preferred responses.

The driver had a good sized 7-inch screen in line of sight with well marked major instruments, selectable secondary display as well. There's a 12.3-inch infotainment screen hosting other features in the middle of the fascia, but I felt this was on the small side and proved slow responding to changes tapped into it.

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Radio
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Heating and ventilation was straightforward, worked well and had satisfactory output and directional setting, backed up by heated mirrors and back screen. Front seats and steering wheel were heated on the Trophy version tested.

The powered mirrors, good sized interior mirror, low waistline and deep windows were complemented by an efficient washer and wipers system and good lights on dip beam but they were a bit short sighted on dark roads.

It comes with a number of intelligent safety systems including speed limit detection, distance alert and lane monitoring.

It is a family car and the room inside was very good, even in the back row, with an average sized loadbed and quick folding split back seats to triple capacity in stages. Oddments space was useful throughout and access to the loadbed and cabin was good.

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Apart from the road and suspension noises mentioned previously, the MG ZS Trophy was a quiet car. The engine did become more noticeable when pushed higher up the rev range but it was not excessively intrusive and the wind and other mechanical sounds were very low.

VERDICT

This MG is a car that most families could find within a reasonable budget, did all their chores and commuting, was miserly with fuel and had most of what they would likely need without being frivolous.

So, technically it’s a step back from the all-electric edge of cliff decision-making to a more grounded family first philosophy.

For: Low price, lots of room, reasonable equipment and good economy with fair performance and comfortable seats, good handling, long warranty.

Against: Constant road noise, lacks top-end grunt, fixed column.

FAST FACTS

Model: MG ZS Trophy Hybrid+

Price: £24,495

Mechanical: 196 bhp 4 cyl 1.5 petrol-hybrid, 3 speed automatic

Max Speed: 104 mph

0 –62 mph: 8.7 secs

Combined MPG: 52 mpg

Insurance Group: 22

C02 emissions: 115 g/km

Bik rating: 28%, £210FY, £180SR

Warranty: 7 years/ 80,000 miles

Size: L 4.43 m (14.53 ft), W 1.82 m (5.97 ft), H 1.64 m (5.38 ft)

Bootspace: 443 to 1,375 litres (15.64 to 48.56 cu.ft)

Kerbweight: 1,420 kg (3,131 lb)

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