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New MG3 – First Impressions

Published: August 20, 2018

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Online version: <https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/new-mg3-first-impressions/>



Chris Adamson assesses the latest version...

(Words and all photos by Chris, with the exception of images of the yellow car - courtesy of MG).

It's billed as the 'New MG3' but even MG admit that their latest five-door hatchback is in reality a mid-life make-over - one that it desperately needed.

Out has gone the thin pinched appearance of previous generations of recent MGs (see the MG6 and GS) and in comes the latest upright stance dominated by an enlarged full frame black finished honeycomb 'star rider' grille first seen on the ZS sports utility.



The front also features new larger and more distinctive daytime LED running lights and bold, deep cut sporting air intakes while body coloured side skirts lower the silhouette stance of the car.

This instantly gives the New MG3 a more substantial feel and certainly brightens up what was a very average predecessor, although when installed on a hatchback this can look a bit out of proportion.

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The rear end also gets the nip and tuck treatment where the stand-out feature is the



rearranged vertical light assembly that provides more prominence to the brake lights, while the roof spoiler is retained and accompanies the MG badge which is larger all round when used on the car.



As when it was first launched in 2013, MG is hoping to attract younger buyers to the model with six bold colours, nine body graphics and three option packs.

Inside, what was already one of the most capacious cabins in the sector, feels even more roomy with the installation of a revised dashboard that stretches out the interior and makes it appear even wider.

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It is dominated by a central 8 inch touch screen (controlling upgraded and enhanced elements such as the audio system and air conditioning) and brightly illuminated twin analogue style instrument read-outs.



Having taken the trouble to design a new dashboard you might have thought MG would have revised its choice of materials, having been criticised for the cheap quality of the plastics on the original MG3 - but no.

While the textured surfaces look OK from a distance, up close they are still very basic - I have some concerns about how well they will wear.

Passenger accommodation both front and rear is generous in terms of leg and head room and the deep boot (with underfloor storage) will swallow up to 285 litres (10.06 cu.ft). The only downside is that the tailgate tapers in towards the roof which restricts the optimum width of the luggage space and items that can be consigned there.



Dropping down the 60/40 split rear seats (which sadly still don't go completely flat) significantly increases the load opportunities up to 1,262 litres (44.57 cu.ft) when packed to the roof.

Three trim levels are offered with the entry level Explore starting at £9,495, the Excite at £11,395 and the range topping Exclusive (which MG anticipates will be its best seller) at £12,795.

All versions get Bluetooth and audio streaming with AUX/USB as standard while the Excite adds in 16inch diamond cut alloy wheels, an 8 inch touchscreen with AppleCarPlay, DAB radio and audio controls mounted on the new chunky steering wheel and the Exclusive

contributes a reversing camera.

On the Road

Those (and that includes myself) who had been hoping MG might take the opportunity to inject a little more zest into the MG3 this time around will be disappointed; it carries on with essentially the same normally aspirated DOHV four-cylinder 1.5 litre VTI-TECH petrol power unit.



The 1 litre three-cylinder turbocharged unit found in the ZS could be made to fit the MG3 but, to date, head of aftersales Daniel Gregorios says there are no plans to do this and



there is not even the option of an automatic transmission. So the MG3 has to soldier on with the 1498cc unit and a five-speed manual transmission.

Delivering a very modest 106 PS this is never going to provide more than modest performance. The only tweak has been to increase the compression ratio to get the emissions to meet the latest Euro 6D regulations, while fuel economy with a combined figure of 47 mpg is possible thanks to stop-start technology.

On reacquainting myself with the MG3 I realised one characteristic I hadn't fully tuned into before -the lack of low end torque.

Press the throttle and there is a distinct delay in power delivery from standstill and things only improve as the needle passes 3,000 rpm, where the unit suddenly comes to life. Keep the revolutions up and the MG3 is a lot more responsive, allowing a good burst of speed in the mid-range where it is much more enjoyable behind the wheel.

The five-speed gearbox doesn't have the quick short throws of a hot hatchback and can feel sloppy at times but is adequate to the task and, with patience, will reward the driver who is willing to keep the engine spinning over.

Having left the chassis and the rest of the running gear alone means the New MG3 handles exactly as its predecessor.

There is a slight tendency for the MacPherson strut front and torsion beam rear suspension to exhibit some lateral movement so it can feel as if it is wallowing into and through corners, but it's not a characteristic that offends or causes any serious problems.

Overall the ride is set-up to create a comfortable if unspectacular driving experience; the only real annoyance is a degree of road noise caused by drumming from the tyres.

The hydraulic power assisted steering is well matched to the rest of the set-up and the New MG3 goes smoothly and amiably wherever it is pointed.



VERDICT

The new MG face for the hatchback is just enough for potential purchasers to give it a second look, the more contemporary feel and almost mini SUV treatment will do a lot for its road presence.

If you then add in a seven year/80,000 mile transferable manufacturer warranty, low insurance groups (7E/8E) and prices that start from under £10,000 (with the option of five years zero per cent finance) the New MG3 could suddenly start appearing on budget-conscious buyers' shopping lists - the fact that it is one of the most spacious in its class won't harm its prospects.

MG admits that it only has modest sales expectations for the New MG3 (currently taking less than a third of all MG sales here in the UK), they will be happy with a few hundred unit rise year-on-year with more attention going into the big selling ZS and the new larger HS sports utility which is slated for the UK in 2019, following its recent unveiling in China.

For anyone who was expecting the MG brand to return to its sporting heritage then it's going to be a longer wait - the all new MG3 is pencilled in for 2022.



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Wheels-Alive Tech Spec. in Brief:

Vehicle: New MG3

Engine: 1498cc four cylinder petrol

Transmission: Five-speed manual

Power: 106PS @ 6,000 rpm



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

Performance:

0-60mph: 10.4 seconds

Top Speed: 108 mph

Fuel Consumption (Official Figures):

Urban: 38.9 mpg

Extra-Urban: 53.8 mpg

Combined: 47.1 mpg

CO2 Emissions: 140 g/km

Price (On the Road): from: £9,495 (£12,795 as tested in Exclusive trim)