For go-manship, not show-manship, would you believe an...

MGB Buick?

Disguise exercise: hide one 218 cube alloy Buick V8 (don't sneer, the Repco mills started from here) under the bonnet of an MGB with no body mods and a single exhaust outlet. Change the final drive. Now climb in and hose off everybody. Understeer on corners? You must be joking, sir: this mill is more than 50 lb. lighter than the original!

by Al Lauder

IMAGINE yourself whistling along the highway in something like a Falcon GT. You're sitting pretty close to the speed limit, restraining the beast under your right foot, drinking in the luxurious feeling of having power on tap whenever you need it. Of course, you bought the car for the status symbol of the whole thing. The big look, with the big power.

You flick a glance in the rear vision mirror and note a dark green MGB in the distance. Although quite unconsciously, your top lip begins to curl, your eyelids droop a fraction - and you settle into your seat a little more. Ho hum, it feels sweet to know the Bee is going to follow your tail lights for the next umpteen miles.

Suddenly, there's a raspy horn note behind you. Another glance in the mirror. Dammit, doesn't that cloth-capped nit recognize the colour of the car? Can't he read the GT insignia on the tail? And still he acts like a pompous bastard and wants to get by.

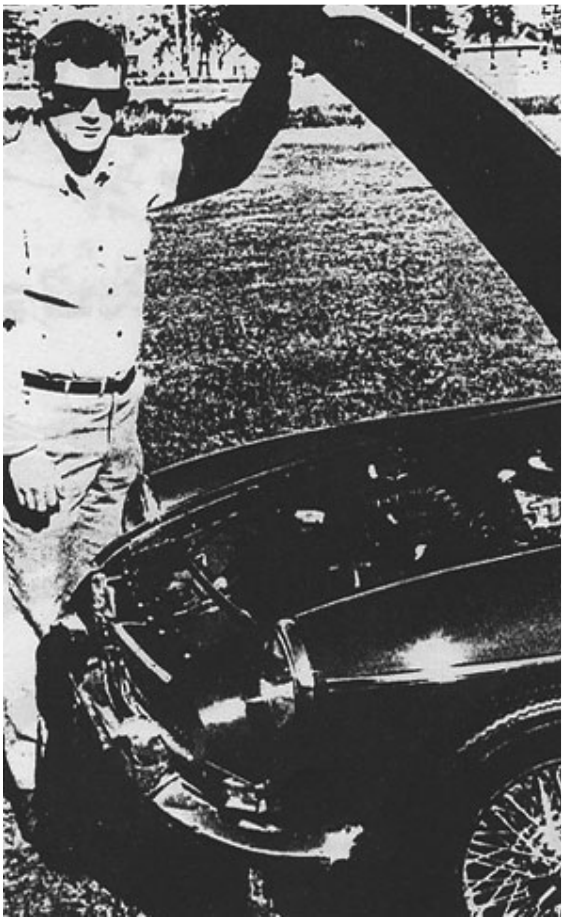
The low-slung car whips past like you were standing still, a green blur slipping by the window with a most unusual exhaust note. Your brow wrinkles. The lip curl turns into a sneer. Your right foot heads a little further for the floor. No impression. The green "thing" becomes smaller before your eyes. And smaller, and....gone!

Unreal. You search your mind for something you may have noticed as it passed you. Nope. Same height. Sure, it had fat wheels, but so do a lot of MGs you've seen lately. No bubble in the hood, no straps holding the bonnet shut like boy-racers do. So, what's all the noise about?

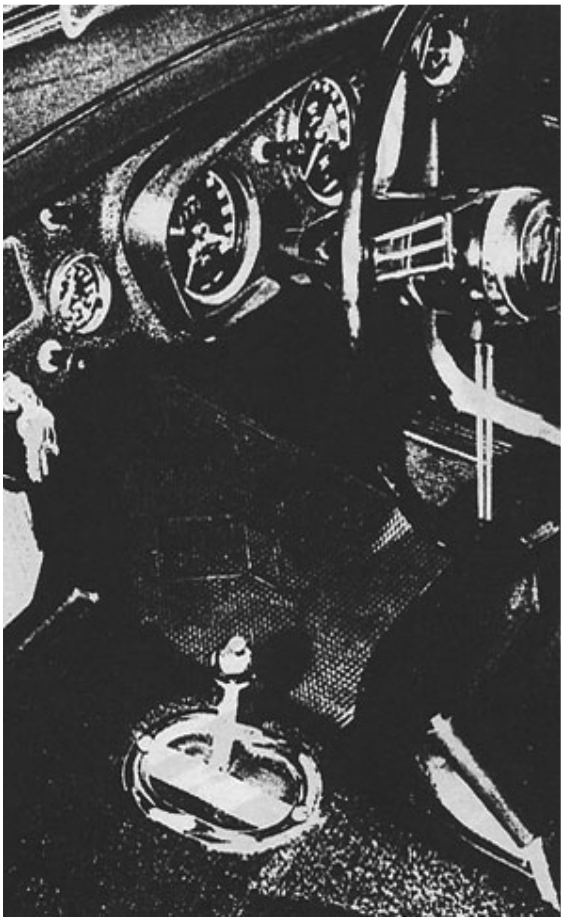
That's it. The noise. That burbling sound. He must have been going 15mph faster, yet he burbled along. It's nothing like the normal Bee sound at all. Something smells, Sherlock!

The sports car in question is owned by Mark Keeley of Balgowlah Heights, Sydney. Being an importer of fine, high-powered American machinery, Mark naturally caught the V8 bug in a big way. He had this MGB sitting around home doing hack service to the shops each day and down to the club on Saturdays. Next thing he knew, he had a spare 1962, 3524 cc alloy Oldsmobile engine coupled to an automatic gearbox, which had set him back $800. This incidentally is the same 218 cu in. alloy Buick on which the first Repco V8 mills were based. As his wife liked the B anyway, and the summer was coming on (a soft top does wonders for

the wife's morale on Sunday afternoons), Mark found himself idly measuring the length of the Olds and the length of the B block. He soon discovered if the B engine and gearbox were removed, there'd be a pretty sizeable hole up front, which just happened to be big enough for the Olds engine.



Mark Keeley, high performance American car importer, proudly lifts the bonnet of his latest toy. The car is most tractable in traffic and an enthusiast's delight on the open road.



The finished job defies detection completely. Apart from the enthusiastic MGB fan, we'd defy anyone to pick the fact that this car has an alloy V8 nestling under the hood.

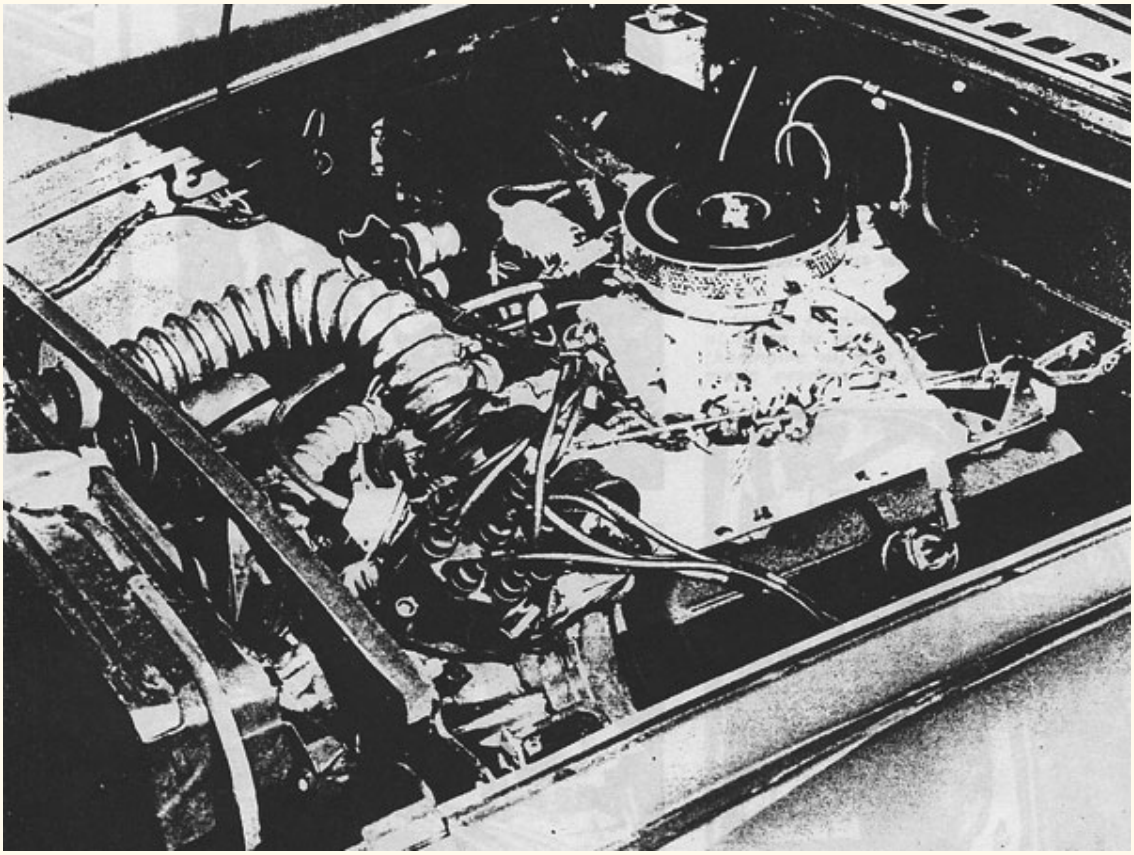
The clincher came when a friend just happened to be looking for a little-used 1967 MGB engine and transmission. So, $540 later, Mark was looking into the hole where the B engine had been.

With the easy part over, the B was without power and the Olds was almost rattling its tappets to be got off the garage floor and into that vacant space. Mark measured again to make sure he hadn't dreamed the whole thing; that the Olds would actually fit into a compartment that was looking smaller every time he turned around, and decided he might as well try the lightweight V8 as sit around waiting for miracles to happen.

Technical reference showed the Olds (complete) to weigh 320 lb as against 358 lb for the original power plant, so there was little problem concerning weight. However, the V8 required more cooling, overcome by grafting extra core-width to the stock MGB radiator.

The engine transplant was easier than expected. The only clearance problems were the firewall and the inside of the wheel arch. This was alleviated by cutting a section back into the firewall to allow room for the larger bell-housing, and notching the inside of the mudguards to clear the exhaust headers.

The engine mounts were fabricated from sheet metal, while the gearbox rested on the original mount after slight modifications. The driveshaft was shortened to suit. The exhaust pipes from each bank of the Olds V8 meet on one side between the engine and gearbox; then run into a stock MGB muffler and tail pipe.



The alloy Olds engine looks like it was made for the MGB engine compartment. Its height is similar to that of the original engine, and modifications to panels were minor. The inside panels of the mudguards were notched to clear the exhaust headers on each side of the car. This panel work, along with slight modifications to the firewall, were the only alterations to the body.

The front oil cooler originally used for the engine oil, now does sterling service for the three-speed Hvdramatic gearbox, as the engine oil runs at normal temperature without this extra cooling. The floor shift for the automatic gearbox is in almost the same place as the former lever was, although the floor was reshaped to suit. As the mats had been chopped up during alterations, new carpeting was fashioned for the whole interior.

On the road, the car is a genuine flyer. The mechanicals are quiet and smooth, much more so than the original MGB unit. Normal MGB rear end gearing gives a top speed of around 90 mph; however, proper gearing to use all of the available torque of the Olds V8 produces a flat out 120 mph top speed.

Although most V8 engines are known to be fuel guzzlers, Mark has experienced a steady 20 mpg without even thinking of trying for fuel economy. The four-barrel Holley carburettor, while not the most economical in the world, provides the potent unit with ample food while giving reasonable economy in return for such an increase in power.

To look at the car, there's virtually no difference from stock. The front wheel arch is a little higher than normal, but that's all. The wire wheels have proved strong enough to handle the extra power, while the disc brakes haven't faltered once. The engine sits no higher (to the top of the carburettor) than the MGB unit did, so there was no need for the air scoops or hood bubbles normally found on conversions of this type.

So the next time you're wanting extra power and torque from your car, think about a transplant before you go buying a heap of bolt-on goodies. You'll near as dammit pay the same price for the finished job – and have a reliable and uncomplicated motor car.