

AUTOMOBILES

NEW MODELS

A sporting MG



MG GS. Photo: MG Motor

The MG brand evokes a certain nostalgia for some drivers but the marque is now catching up by putting the sport into its MG GS sport utility vehicle

Mark Andrews

British Leyland, Austin Rover, MG Rover, or whatever else you want to call it, was like a British soap opera – long running, with a plot lurching from one crisis to another, with never really any glamour and it generally left you feeling disappointed. It should have been all over in 2005 with the appointment of the administrators, but the Chinese decided to kick-start their car industry with the remains of the last British volume carmaker.

MG Roewe, by way of divorce, reconciliation and a name change, has not only taken on the heritage but inadvertently the drama. The Rover SD1, 800 and 75 were all meant to be the last-chance saloon under British ownership, full of potential but never quite achieving what they should have. With Roewe seeming to be the domestic brand, and MG for both export and Chinese sales, it is up to the marque previously best known for small sports cars to breathe life into the company.

In Britain, where there is still considerable nostalgia for Rover and MG, sales were hotly anticipated. Before MG and Roewe rejoined at the end of 2007, both Chinese companies promised imminent sales in Britain. The excitement was lost by the time the MG 6 made it to those shores in 2011. Hampered by an antiquated drivetrain, initial sales were appalling despite it having good handling. Things got off to a

better start with the MG3, thanks to keen pricing and customisability.

With the MG ZS having been unveiled at this month's Guangzhou Auto Show, we decided to take a look at the brand's first stab at an SUV – the MG GS – and here, the carmaker put the sport in sports utility vehicle. At last, it's a car from the new MG that does not suffer from lacklustre performance. For the Chinese market, there is a choice of 1.5 and 2.0 litre turbocharged engines.

Our test car came with the 1.5T developed in collaboration with General Motors, available with either a six-speed manual or seven-speed dry dual auto-



matic transmission. With 166hp on tap, the engine gives brisk performance once the turbo kicks in. Changes are smooth with the dual-clutch system. Paddle shifts are only offered on the 2.0T Deluxe trim, so the only option is to use the drive selector. Despite similar weight and dimensions to the Nissan Qashqai, the 1.5T has a slower top speed (190km/h) and uses more fuel than the European specification 1.6T Nissan.

One of the first things you notice when driving is that there is little travel with the brake, meaning even a light tap of the pedal leads to quite jarring braking. The steering is also on the light side and does not give the feel or precision you would hope for. Generally the ride is quite smooth but a corrugated stretch of road did create a lot of shaking in the cabin.

Externally the car is modern looking but the rear seems to have too many competing lines to create a

good visual impact. On the inside, hard plastics dominate the dashboard and it is aesthetically boring.

The MG 3 is funky, thanks to coloured inlays around the air vents, and it would have been good to see something similar in the GS. Or, as is currently popular in many new Chinese cars, dual colour seats. It is left to the orange-piped floor mats to inject the only element of excitement.

There is a choice of beige or black leather seats with the dashboard remaining black no matter which option is chosen. The base model gets a 6-inch touchscreen infotainment system. On the Deluxe trim, this is upgraded to an 8-inch system using SAIC's InkaNet 4.0. Similar to GM's OnStar system, it provides features like a 24-hour telephone service to assist with navigation or in cases of emergency. It also comes with Mirrorlink, allowing you to slave your phone to the system and operate from the infotainment screen features including apps. There are also more standard features, such as the reverse camera with dynamic guidance.

In the back there is enough space for three adults with good head and leg room. While the seats do fold pretty much flat, the bench does not come up, leaving a gap to the front seats. The boot is sturdy and there is a small compartment below the floor and above the spare wheel. Capacity is one of the largest in class, beating even the Volkswagen Tiguan.

Prices start at a reasonable 109,700 yuan (HK\$124,000) and go up to 179,700 yuan. However, the specifications seem on the low side compared with some Chinese competitors. You would expect on top-spec models some features like blind-spot warning indicators, lane departure or even a head-up display.

FIVE OF THE BEST

MACAU SHOWCASE RACERS STAY IN THE RACE BACKED BY BEST TECHNOLOGY

William Wadsworth

This weekend's Macau Grand Prix reveals several fast cars that could switch your marque loyalty, or tempt you on to the track as a team owner or driver. The following five cars are packed with the latest racing technology, and marques' track backup.

Rowe Racing could bring out the best of BMW on the 6.2km Guia Circuit.

Nick Catsburg of the Netherlands debuts the stunning **BMW M6 GT3** in the Macau Grand Prix's 18-lap FIA GT World Cup, at 12.55pm on Sunday. The 586-horsepower racer has a 4.4-litre V8 engine with M TwinPower Turbo technology linked to a six-speed sequential racing transmission, and won July's 24 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps. It looks powerful, yet weighs less than 1,300kg, and shows how the marque's BMW Motorsports unit "placed great importance on [the car's] efficiency and ease of maintenance, as well as reliability, which is particularly

crucial at the 24-hour classics", BMW says.

The €379,000 racer's cabin has a colour display with an optional logger function; an illuminated control panel; and fire-extinguishing system and motorsport wiring harness with various free sockets. Catsburg's Aussie teammate Ricky Capó will drive a BMW Z4 GT3.

Look out too for a pair of **Mercedes-AMG GT3s** in the same race. One is driven by FIA GT World Cup champion Maro Engel of Germany; the other by Renger van der Zande of the Netherlands, and both represent the Mercedes-AMG Driving Academy Macau. The beautiful Mercedes-AMG GT3 has an AMG 6.3-litre V8 engine and its six-speed sequential racing gearbox is mounted across the rear axle to improve weight distribution," Mercedes-Benz says, "as is the case in the standard GT".

The Mercedes-AMG GT3 reportedly costs about €372,000 (HK\$3.08 million) and seems built for gentlemen drivers as well as professionals, especially with a

paddle shift that the carmaker says "allows drivers of all skill levels to build up confidence in the car very quickly".

The car's safety features include a roof escape-and-rescue hatch; a light, rigid aluminium spaceframe; a high-tensile steel roll-over cage; and carbon-fibre seatpan, aerofoil and other bodywork components. The two GT3s also introduce the AMG Customer Sport division, which offers racing teams technology, expertise, manpower, and can even provide trackside parts and AMG Driver Pool drivers.

Also in the same race, look out for Craft Bamboo Racing's Darryl O'Young in arguably the world's brightest **Porsche 911 GT3 R**. The four-litre, six-cylinder Boxer racer, one of five Porsche 911 GT3 Rs in the race, weighs 1,220kg, thanks to a lightweight body "featuring intelligent aluminium-steel composite" and thrusts 500hp via a six-speed constant-mesh, sequential gearbox and a carbon motorsport clutch. The 911 is also fitted with power-assisted steering with an



electrohydraulic pressure feed; a pneumatically activated paddle shift; an FT3 safety fuel cell and a six-point safety harness.

Macau 2000 Grand Prix winner Andre Couto and Italian Mirko Bortolotti are each scheduled to drive a **Lamborghini Huracan GT3** for the Pescara-based FFF Racing team. The 1,230kg, rear-wheel-drive racer has a hybrid chassis of aluminium and carbon fibre, carbon composite body panels and a manually adjustable rear wing on 18-inch wheels. Its 5.2-litre direct-injection V10 engine vrooms via a Hör six-speed sequential transmission. Its steering wheel is a mass of buttons for the control of

13 electronic systems, from the 10-position Bosch Motorsport ABS system to radio communications, light flashers, a drink system; and traction-control electronics that adjust the car's road grip and amount of tyre wear. The Lamborghini Huracan GT3's safety features include a carbon fibre shell; an OMP fire-extinguishing system with seven nozzles; and a roof rescue hatch.

Finally, Audi races its 585hp, 5.2-

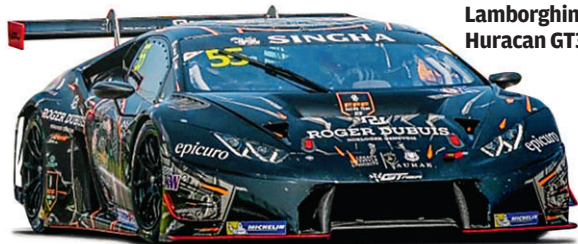
litre, **Audi R8 LMS** (€369,000) driven by Edoardo Mortara. This 585hp halo car is distributed in Asia by Audi Sport customer racing Hong Kong, which also supports teams in the region's major series with spare parts, cars and drivers. The Four Rings also introduces Macau to the 300hp Touring Car Racing (TCR) version of the **RS 3 LMS**, which hits 100km/h in about 4.5 seconds and tops at about 240km/h. Its driver protection includes a safety cell, fuel tank seat, and a roof rescue hatch.

This racy car was developed for the emerging TCR series that has already held support races at FIA Formula One and 24 Hours of Nürburgring events. It is also an "attractive opportunity to get started in fascinating Audi racing", according to Audi Sport managing director Stephan Winkelmann. The TCR market is ideal for that as it has "even larger potential than that of the GT3 category", says Chris Reinke,

head of Audi Sport customer racing.

"In 2016, there were 10 TCR series with races in 18 countries, and more series are being added. With the TCR version of the RS 3, we're also reaching countries where no GT3 races are held. The costs for a TCR race car are very low," Reinke said. Prices online range from €129,000 for the TCR version with a sequential six-speed racing transmission, and €99,000 for a club sport version. Deliveries are expected to start in December.

Meanwhile, muscular TCR versions of the Volkswagen Golf GTI, Honda Civic, Citroën Elysée, Seat León SEQ, and Alfa Romeo Giulietta will race in the Suncity Group Macau Guia Race 2.0T, at 10am until noon on Sunday. Look out for the Maserati Quattroporte Medical Car (HK\$1.4 million). The 350hp, three-litre V6 tonnes in 5.5 seconds and tops at 270km/h – just what the doctor ordered.



Lamborghini Huracan GT3



Mercedes-AMG GT3



Porsche 911 GT3 R



BMW M6 GT3