

On test in China

It's been two years since MG dropped the 6 from their UK line-up, although the car soldiered on in China until replacement late last year. So when SAIC invited us to their 2018 Overseas Media Tour event with the tagline *Energize the Future*, we were brimming with curiosity.

• REPORT: MARK ANDREWS



When we arrived at Shanghai's Tianma Race Circuit, a shorter track than the one used for the F1 GP, a collection of the latest cars from both MG and Maxus awaited us. Maxus started off as SAIC's commercial vehicle arm made up of the remnants of LDV, a brand name it still uses in some markets such as Australia and Ireland. Recently the marque has morphed into yet another passenger brand, firstly with the G10 MPV and last year with the D90 large SUV.

And of the cars available for testing, the D90 was in many ways the most impressive. High build quality and good

performance are a promising start for a car rumoured to be the basis of the future large MG SUV and that has already spawned the Roewe RX8.

Headlining the MG range was the new 6, both in 1.5-litre turbo and plug-in hybrid form. Also available was the late life facelifted MG3 bringing a new interior including a touchscreen, and exterior modifications drawing its appearance into line with the ZS. We saw the UK versions last issue, but debuting in China was a new four speed automatic transmission, and a power boost for the car's 1.5-litre engine to 118bhp (88kW).

Interestingly there was not just a ZS

representing the brand's SUVs, but also an RX5. Regular readers will remember that in the April edition we tested this car, which was originally branded as a Roewe. For some markets such as Chile it has been rebadged as an MG and sold with 1.5T and 2.0T engines, but SAIC claim they have no plans to bring the car to the UK. We had a quick drive of the MG RX5 in 2.0T form over obstacles simulating a non-parallel bridge, hillside and bumpy road. With its 4WD setup it proved fairly competent, but not as good as the Maxus T60 pickup truck powered by a 2.8 turbo diesel. MG relegated the only ZS available, fitted with the normally



point and make it into a much sportier looking proposition. According to MG's UK Head of Sales and Marketing Daniel Gregorious **[see our interview with him in the September issue - Ed]** we're not getting the MG6 in the UK, and although it features the hatchback that is more popular in Europe than in China, the overall design looks Asian. For some reason, from certain angles – and particularly the rear – I can't help being reminded of the Toyota Corolla E110 liftback from around 20 years ago. Whilst in certain pictures the car looks good, it fails to deliver in the metal and this is probably the fault of the boot design.

MG's 'Star Rider' grille (as first seen on the ZS) and the sloping bonnet certainly give the front a sporting poise, though. At 4695mm it is only marginally longer (44mm) than its predecessor with a similarly small increase in width and a decrease in height. We drove the top of the range Trophy spec car, which curiously only has a badge on the left side D-pillar. Cynics will also point to cost cutting with the lack of a rear windscreen wiper as seen on the facelift of the old MG6. To be fair though, for a car that MG in China describes as a four door coupé it probably benefits from the omission. Currently in China the car only comes with a choice of four colours: red, black, white and silver – gone is the Birmingham orange.

At first glance the interior is light years ahead of the old model, and it also looks significantly different to the inside of the i6. Our Trophy-trimmed car came with a red and black interior giving a sporty appearance. Features such as the metal pedals and carbon-fibre look plastics help add to the effect of the dashboard swathed in red leather. (An all-black SAIC »

aspirated 1.5, to use on a slalom course.

The big interest for us though was the return of the MG6. The car premiered at the Guangzhou Auto Show last November and put paid to speculation that it might be called the ZT. Just as the old MG6 was based on the Roewe 550, this car is based on the 550's replacement – the i6. Shao JingFeng, who spent many years working at Volkswagen in Germany, heads up SAIC design and was responsible for the i6 which, while contemporary, looks to my eyes generically Teutonic.

Again MG has managed to take a smart but ultimately bland starting





ABOVE: Luggage capacity was always a strong suit of the MG6, and the new version is not lacking in this regard.

proved in cars such as the D90 and RX5 that they can do good interiors, but unfortunately once again with this MG it doesn't quite live up to the initial promise. The top of the dashboard and doors are hard plastics – excusable on a budget supermini such as the 3, but not in the 6's segment, particularly when it seems like the company tried hard to make it look good.

Equipment levels are high though, with features such as heating and cooling for the front electrically adjustable seats. Many of the functions such as the cabin climate are operated from the 10.1in touchscreen. There is also voice control for functions such as navigation.

Rear passengers have reasonable head and legroom, and access to their own air vents. MG in the UK now offer a seven year warranty on the ZS, but it looks as though some of the 6's interior parts may well need replacing within this



ABOVE: The MG6 is billed in China as a four door coupé rather than a hatchback as we'd know it in the UK.

RIGHT: Mark was not impressed by some of the plastics used, but the red and black interior has moved upmarket.

period. Despite a sturdy floor and sides on the boot, part of the parcel shelf's underside had fallen off showing the cheap white glue that had been used to attach it. Come on SAIC, if you're going to do an Overseas Media Day, at least select cars that don't have visible manufacturing faults!

Cars were in a limited supply ratio to the number of guests at the event and we only managed a few laps with the new 6 of the Tianma Circuit, which while FIA F3 approved is only just over 2km. The steering wheel is both contoured and flat-bottomed, looking racy with its red stitching and F1 style paddle shifts. Easing it out onto the track it soon became apparent that this is the MG many have been waiting for – it might not be a two seater, but that steering wheel is not all about show. Currently there are only two powertrain choices for the car. There is the standard MG6 which is only available with the same 1.5T unit and 7



speed DSG as in the GS, and then there is the eMG6 which has the 1.0T unit from the ZS and couples this with an 82hp electric motor – more on the eMG6 later. As the Roewe i6 is also available with a 1.0T unit, it is possible this may be added later as an option for a more sedate and cheaper standard 6.

With 166bhp, the Cube Tech engine developed in conjunction with General Motors has no shortage of power on





Sister brand Roewe has for some years been producing both pure electric (BEV) and plug-in hybrid (PHEV) cars for the Chinese market with considerable success. The e550 was a PHEV version of the Roewe 550 and in 2016, its last full year of sales before the e6 replaced it, sold 15,145 units.

Externally there seems little differentiation between the MG6 and the eMG6 bar the badges, and according to Gregorius he is considering bringing this version to the UK. The electrified



tap. Mated in China to a 7 speed dry dual clutch, putting your foot to the floor delivers brisk acceleration and 62mph comes in 7.1 seconds. This is over a second faster than the Roewe i6 it was based on, and makes it one of the fastest standard cars in its class.

The old 6 had a reputation for being one of the best handling cars in its class, and initial indications show that the new 6 has the potential to live up to its predecessor. Road holding under heavy acceleration and braking on the track is good, the 6 remaining both agile and controlled, with only a hint of tail slide at times. Steering though is overly light, with little in the way of feedback. Unfortunately driving on a track left us completely unable to judge the car's ride, thanks to the smooth surfaces.

We also got a brief drive of the eMG6 – the first electrified production MG.



ABOVE: Handling was always a strong suit of the old MG6, and Mark was impressed with the roadholding, braking and handling of the new model out on track.



ABOVE: 1: Maxus D90. 2: Maxus G10. 3: Maxus T60. 4: MG3 facelift. 5: MG RX5.

