

MOTORING

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Basic instincts

The MG3 Streetwise bears more than a passing resemblance to its unremarkable British forerunner, writes **Mark Andrews**

The mainland seems to have inherited a few dramas along with the remains of MG Rover. First designs went to SAIC and the factory to Nanjing Motors, resulting in two competing versions of the Rover 75 badged respectively as the Roewe 750 and the MG7. Then the government forced the reluctant partners into bed and we had the birth (or is that rebirth?) of MG-Roewe.

Due to the difficulty of establishing Roewe's brand internationally, the marque's cars are likely to be sold abroad as MGs. In Chile the Roewe 550 has already been displayed with MG badges. But in the mainland it seems MG will once again return to the sporting heritage of its MG-Rover arrangement. Pictures are circulating in the mainland's motoring press of a more sporty hatchback version of the 550 badged as an MG6.

The MG3 Streetwise is likely to be the last we see of the old-school MG-Rover designs, thanks to the new cars being developed. Essentially a Rover 25 Streetwise with a new badge, the MG3 is nothing terribly new; it has gained LED indicator lights on the wing mirrors and a more modern rear light cluster. The build quality is reasonable, although the front wings don't meet the bonnet evenly.

Sit in the driver's seat and you'll see not much has changed, right down to the interior's iffy quality. The instruments and steering wheel are straight out of the Rover 25, and the control stalks for the lights and windscreen wipers seem flimsy. The buttons for the windows next to the handbrake and on the rear doors are also pretty basic, consisting of unmarked plastic lumps.

With the car's central console, MG has tried to create a funkier, more rounded look. From beneath the clock display jut two huge cylindrical air vents, opened by

turning the outer rim clockwise. The rim on one of the vents felt rather loose, however, and one of its blades was already broken. The CD/radio is at the bottom of the console, and there are controls for it on the steering wheel.

The Streetwise is available in Comfort and Luxury models, and the latter boasts plenty of kit. Electric wing mirrors, sunroof and windows are standard across the range, as is air conditioning. The test car is also fitted with Bluetooth and a USB port to connect an MP3 player. The

Luxury model has six stereo speakers, two more than the Comfort. A compass display appears on the rear-view mirror, as does a distance indicator for the rear radar sensor.

The seats are a carry-over from the Rover, but are comfortable and supportive. In the back of the original Streetwise there were two sports-style seats, but in the MG3 they've been replaced by a more typical split bench arrangement. Legroom is acceptable, but taller

adults may find their heads hitting the roof, and the middle passenger gets only a lap restraint rather than a full seatbelt.

If the Streetwise's interior is a letdown, its performance makes up for it. Driving the 1.8 automatic out of MG's flagship showroom in Nanjing, I initially mistake the car for a manual, even though the manual-looking gear shifter is connected to Rover's old Stepspeed continuously variable transmission unit.

On the highways around Nanjing, the engine proves to have

more than enough power for effortless overtaking, and with an elevated driving position the Streetwise affords excellent all-round visibility. Coupled with the plucky performance, that adds up to a great drive, despite the fact that neither the engine nor gearbox are class-leading technology.

On the winding roads around Purple Mountain towards Sun Yat-sen's mausoleum, the car takes well to being thrown around corners. Road-holding is good, and although the steering is light, it's precise and

instils confidence. For front passengers the ride is soft, but sit in the back and you'll find yourself bounced around a bit. The car performs well on a range of surfaces, although on longer journeys the offset accelerator position might become tiring.

When MG made the Rover 75, it pulled out all the stops, but with the MG3 the aim seems to have been to produce a cheaper car. The Rover 25 was never known for its quality, and MG has done little to improve that. The Streetwise seems to be an

AT A GLANCE:
MG3 Streetwise

What drives it? Either a 1.4-litre engine with a five-speed manual box or a 1.8-litre with a CVT automatic provide power to the front wheels.

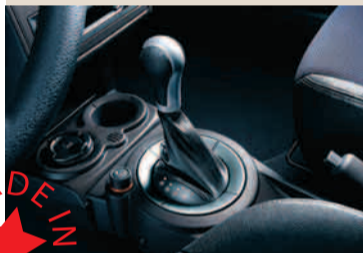
How fast is it? MG says the 1.4 has a top speed of 180km/h and can hit 100km/h in 10.6 seconds. It claims 185km/h and 0-100km/h in 9.7 seconds for the 1.8-litre.

How safe is it? With such old underpinnings and only two airbags, safety is questionable.

How thirsty is it? The 1.4 at 90km/h drinks 5.3l/100km, and the 1.8 6.1/100km.

How clean is it? CO2 emissions are 199g/km for the 1.8, the equivalent of 1.66 Smart ForTos, and the engines meet the Euro III standard.

Available: The 1.4-litre version costs 75,800-89,800 yuan (HK\$86,000-HK\$102,000) and the 1.8-litre will set you back 95,800-109,800 yuan.

MADE IN
CHINA

attempt to breathe some life back into smaller Rovers on the cheap and attract younger buyers.

Based on Rover's old design, the Streetwise is showing its age. Although it's one of the original crossover vehicles, in the mainland it has to compete with the more modern VW Polo Cross and Suzuki SX4. It remains to be seen whether the pleasure of driving the car and the low price of the 1.8-litre version are enough to persuade potential buyers to overlook its disappointing interior and dated design.

Footdown

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If you're not sure what Christmas gift to buy the car lover in your life, look no further than the showroom of their favourite make. Many dealers' accessories departments stock marque-approved and badged ranges of car and trackwear, sunglasses, desk and toy items. Here are some last-minute gift ideas.

Porsche
1911 GT3 Speed II chronograph: quartz movement; split-time measurement and date display; stopwatch function for up to 12 hours and tachymeter; luminescent hour and minute hands; genuine carbon dial; black stainless steel case with anti-reflective sapphire crystal watch face; Rubber strap in black

hour and minute hands; solid titanium case with anti-reflective sapphire crystal watch face; durable synthetic strap in black with tyre-tread pattern on the inside; diameter 44mm; limited edition of 911 worldwide, HK\$6,459
2 911 GT2 Classic chronograph: quartz movement; split-time measurement and date display; stopwatch function for up to 12 hours and tachymeter; luminescent hour and minute hands; genuine carbon dial; black stainless steel case with anti-reflective sapphire crystal watch face; Rubber strap in black

with tyre-tread pattern on the inside; design based on the colours of the GT2 interior; diameter 44mm; limited edition of 911 examples offered worldwide, HK\$6,459
3 Men's polo shirt: buttons bear the Porsche logo; "911 to the core" logo on the front in same colour as the fabric; Porsche transfer print on the back; contrasting interior seams; cotton; in black and blue, HK\$930
4 911 GT3 Cup model car: a detailed, 1:43 scale, collectors' model of the Porsche 911 GT3 Cup UPS car competing in the 2008 Porsche Carrera Cup, HK\$516

Porsche Centre Hong Kong, 262 Gloucester Road, G/F Top Glory Tower, Causeway Bay. Tel: 2926 2911

Ferrari
5 Handmade model Enzo limited edition 500: scale 1:43, HK\$788
6 Travel bag: 70cm x 34cm x 33cm, HK\$1,018
7 Windbreaker, HK\$1,244
8 Ferrari 3S Centre, Ground Floor, Horizon Plaza, 2 Lee Wing Street, Ap Lei Chau. Tel: 2873 9263

Mercedes-Benz
8 R-Class 1:18 model car: in cubanite

silver or silver and black, HK\$770
9 Thermos cup, HK\$340
10 Coasters, HK\$520
Zung Fu Company, Shop B01 & G01, Lee Gardens Two, 28 Yun Ping Road, Causeway Bay. Tel: 2895 7339

Bentley
11 Brooklands Bear: Bentley's soft "Brooklands" teddy bear sports a driving jacket, helmet and goggles, with a Birkin spot scarf, HK\$480
12 2006 Azure 1:43 model car: with the hood lowered to reveal a crafted interior, the Azure scale model captures the elegance of the real car.

In Meteor with a Cotswold and Nautic Blue interior, HK\$761
13 2008 Continental GT Speed 1:18 model car in Cumbrian Green with the latest Speed 20-inch wheels and new front and rear bumpers. Opening doors, bonnet and boot, HK\$1,714
G/F, Bonaventure House, 91 Leighton Road, Causeway Bay. Tel: 2890 1918

Maserati
14 Avant Garde cufflinks: HK\$982
15 Grey scarf: HK\$1,232
16 Teddy bear, HK\$541
Ferrari 3S Centre. Tel: 2873 9263

Jaguar
17 Leather card holder, HK\$380
18 Leaping cat paperweight: a terrific gift for Big Cat fans, \$2,800
G/F 56 Gloucester Road, Wan Chai. Tel: 2520 0989

Subaru
19 Bag: HK\$1,318
20 Radio-controlled rally racer for the young at heart: HK\$558
21 Let your toddlers take the wheel of this toy car: HK\$744
Flat B, G/F, Block A, Tung Chun Industrial Bldg, 9-11 Cheung Wing Road, Kwai Chung. Tel: 2393 6270