



# QUICK GUIDE TO BUYING AN MGF/TF

By Colin Grant

One of the commonly asked questions we get asked at Kimber House is 'I'm going to look at an MGF/TF, can you give me some advice on what to look for?' We thought a quick buying guide to this modern classic would be helpful.

As when buying any car there are points you should look out for and the MGF/TF is no exception. The purpose of this guide therefore is to make you aware of the main points that should be considered before parting with your hard earned cash.

**Good News – Bad News:**

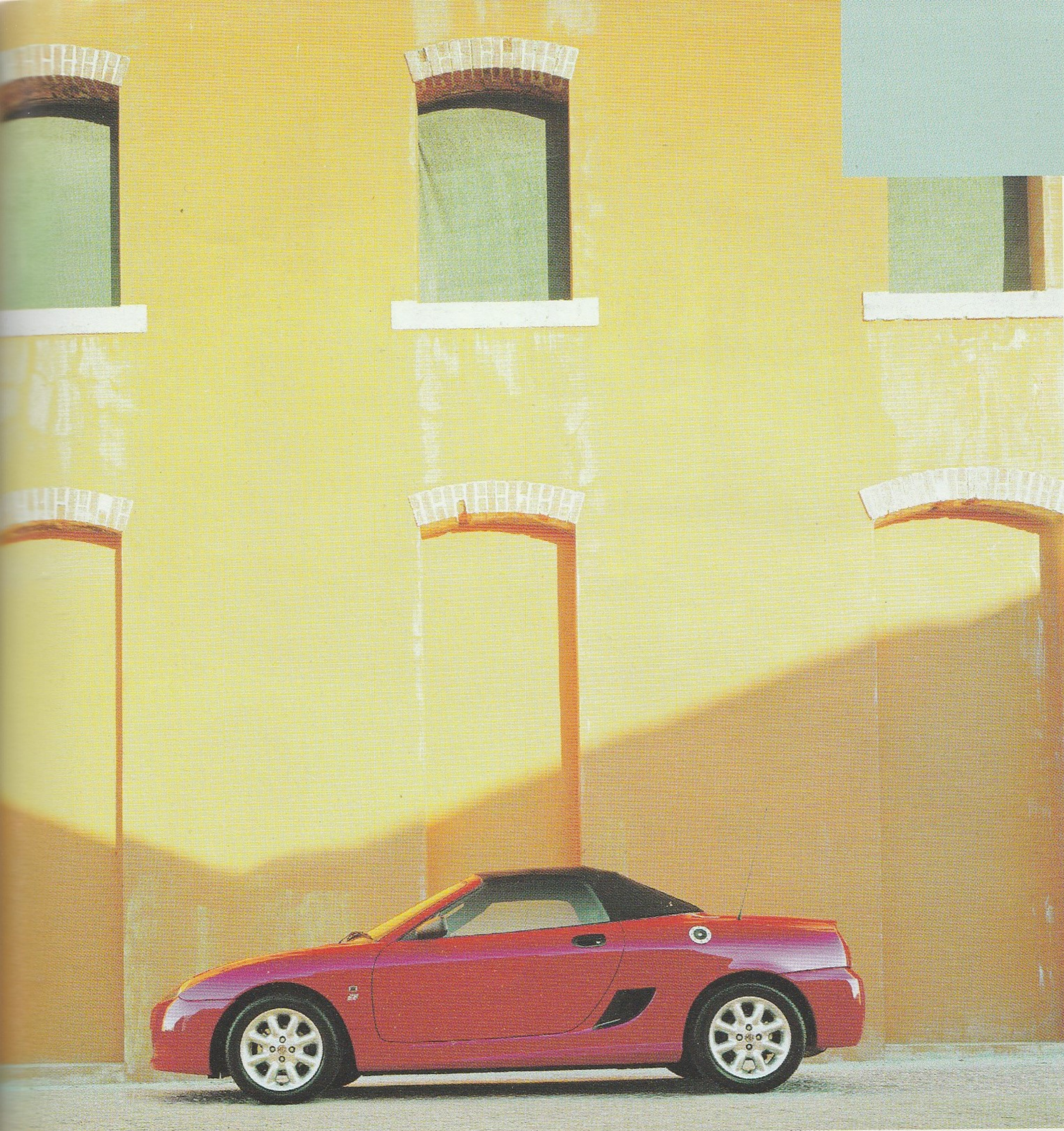
The good news is that there are many MG specialists who will happily look after your car and new spare parts are readily available, including many breakers who offer up good second-hand parts at realistic prices. EBay is also a good source of parts for the do-it-yourself mechanic.

The bad news is that if you are non-mechanical and don't take the necessary steps in checking the car before buying, you can be left with a sports car that may need more spent on it than the car is worth!! So be warned.

**Do your homework:**

It's important to do some research before going to see a car as there are varying trim levels and engine options to choose from. Pay as much as you can afford with prices varying from a few hundred pounds





crash damage or if the car has been written off at any time and what category it was assigned. This really is a must, as the information supplied could help you to negotiate the price, or walk away if for instance the car has been written off in the past. Also available from [motinfo.direct.gov.uk](http://motinfo.direct.gov.uk) is the MOT history which will also show the car's current MOT status, plus any past failures and advisories.

The Club have an excellent website dedicated to buying an MG, with many tips and hints; go to [www.buyinganmg.com](http://www.buyinganmg.com).

### When viewing:

It's a good idea to take along a set of overalls, mechanic's gloves, torch, and trolley jack/axle stands.

Firstly ask to see all the necessary paperwork and check the VIN number matches the one on the car. A full service history with a stamped up book and receipts is a real bonus. Start with looking around the outside of the car for any sign of accident damage, scratches, poor panel gaps etc. Check under the bonnet for any signs of damage to the inner wings/chassis legs which will mean the car has been involved in an accident at some time. Also look in the boot, lift the carpet and check for any damage to the body panels. Look at the rear screen in the hood. If it's glass that is a bonus as they are also heated, but if it's plastic make sure you can easily see through it as they are prone to discolouring. Get the owner to operate the lights and pay particular attention to the MGF headlights as the reflectors are prone to becoming opaque and are costly to replace. Operate the doors and make

for an early rough F to £10,000 for a very low mileage mint condition TF. As a choice I would go for a limited edition over a standard car as these do seem to hold their prices better. Latterly there are also the TFs built under Chinese ownership, being the LE500, TF85th, and standard TF135. These of course will command a higher price.

### Insurance:

Once you have decided on the model you wish to look for, check out the insurance cost, as a TF160 with a 1.8 litre 160bhp engine is obviously going to be in a higher insurance group than a TF115 with a 1.6 115bhp.

### Where to look:

The cars for sale section in *Safety Fast!* is the ideal place to start. There are of course alternatives if you can't find what you are looking for, including other publications. Many MG specialists sell Fs and TFs but these normally command higher prices, but will come with a warranty, and in many cases will have had the cambelt and head gasket replaced. EBay is another area to look but you do take a chance if you don't have the opportunity of looking over the car before buying. Another alternative is

to attend an auction, but again you are taking a chance buying this way as test drives before the auction are not normally permitted, although you can visually inspect the car and hear the engine running.

### Before you view:

Before you go along to view a car ask for the registration number so you can carry out an HPI check. An HPI check can be carried out on the internet. A typical site is [www.mycarcheck.com](http://www.mycarcheck.com) who can, for around £10, supply you with all the information you need as to whether there is any outstanding finance, colour change,

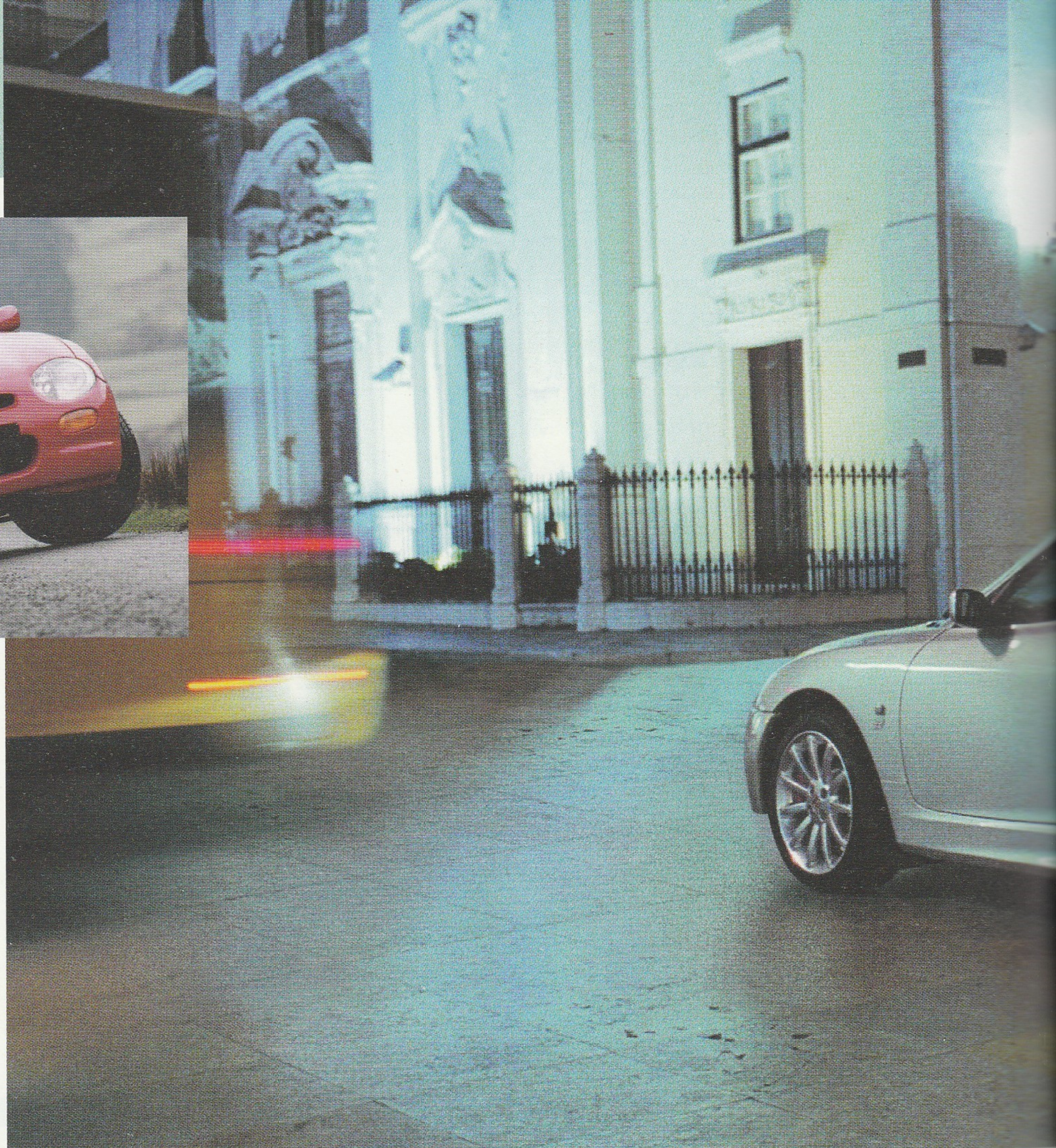




sure they can be opened easily from inside and outside the car. Make sure there are two key fobs and operate the door locks using these. If slow to respond it could be simply that the batteries in the fob need changing. Check that both wipers work as the linkage is known to fail, leaving only one wiper working.

While checking the car, ask as many questions as you can to build up a picture of how the car has been looked after: questions such as how long have you owned the car, who services the car, what coolant do you use (there are two main types), what oil do you use, has the head gasket been replaced etc. A knowledgeable owner who can answer these questions will more than likely have looked after their car, but someone who replies *I don't know* or *I'm not sure* has been the opposite, so beware

Make sure you check the make, condition and size (different size tyres between front and back) of the tyres, as cheap tyres can have a major effect on the handling qualities of the car. Whilst checking the tyres look at the condition of the discs; a deep ridge around the edge



of the disc denotes worn discs in need of replacement complete with pads. Check to see if the wheels have been kerbed, and if they have been badly damaged, note this as a bargaining point as refurbishment can be costly.

Check the header tank in the boot area by undoing the cap (when the engine is cold) and making sure the coolant is at the half way level and that it is not a sludgy brown colour which may indicate a head gasket failure. Next remove the dipstick to check that the oil is clean with no milky deposits on it, which again may suggest a head gasket

failure. (Short journeys, in winter, can cause this issue so be aware of this.)

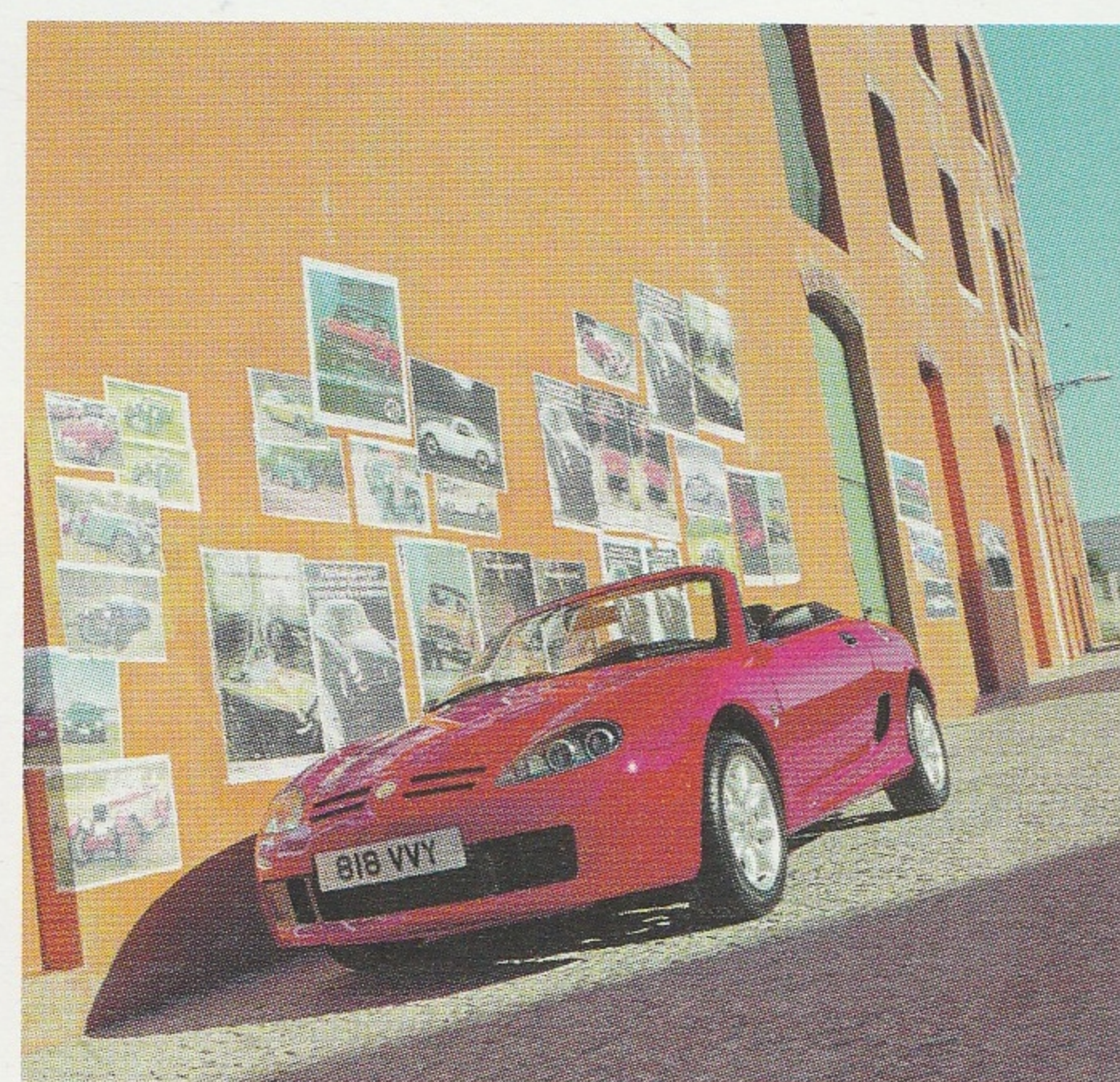
If the owner will allow you, use the trolley jack/axle stands to check underneath the car for signs of corrosion, particularly on the subframes, engine/subframe mounts and coolant pipes. Also look at the condition of the exhaust and catalytic converter; replacing these can be expensive.

Check inside the car and look for wear on the driver's seat bolster which is prone to wear. Check the condition of the carpets and general interior. If the owner will let you lift the carpet in the foot wells, check to see if the felt underneath is wet due to water ingress. Check the heater fan works on all settings; if not, the heater resistor will need replacing. Operate the hood and check its operation/condition. Pull on the handbrake to check its operation; this should pull up one or two clicks at most and have a positive feel to it. If not, the linkage on the rear brakes could be seized.

#### Test Drive:

Go for a test drive, insurance/owner permitting, and check out the gear change which should be smooth in the





to a garage and were working on a tight budget. But if you are an experienced home mechanic with a fully equipped home workshop and are looking for a project, you could negotiate the price down and once renovated have a great run-around car.

### Final tips:

If you have limited mechanical knowledge then find someone who has better knowledge and will come with you to view a car. If you are a member of the AA or RAC you could arrange for them to do an inspection of the car. There is also an independent firm called Classic Assessments who also offer this service. When looking round the car make a mental note of all the minus points and use these in negotiating the price. Have a budget in mind and stick to it, but spend the most you can to obtain the best car available.

*To supplement this 'quick view' there are some very good publications available. I strongly suggest the purchase of one of these for a more in-depth guide to buying your ideal MG/TF. ●*

up and down changes. Check the clutch operation. Stiffness when applying the clutch could denote a seizing operating arm that would need the gearbox to be removed for replacement. Also check to see if any warning lights are staying on in the dashboard. Check the operation of the brakes and that the car pulls up squarely without pulling to one side.

The MGF/TF has excellent handling abilities and should corner almost as if on rails. The ride in the F should be very smooth and comfortable taking road undulations in its stride. If you find the ride

is harsh and bumpy the suspension may need attention as the ride height is very important to the ride quality. The TF will be harsher, particularly if the sports pack one (lowered suspension) has been fitted.

### Bargaining Points:

If you find that the head gasket has not been replaced, the coolant pipes/car underside is rusty, the discs are worn then it will pay you to walk away, as there are many more cars out there and the cost of rectifying these areas of the car would be prohibitive if you entrusted the repairs



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