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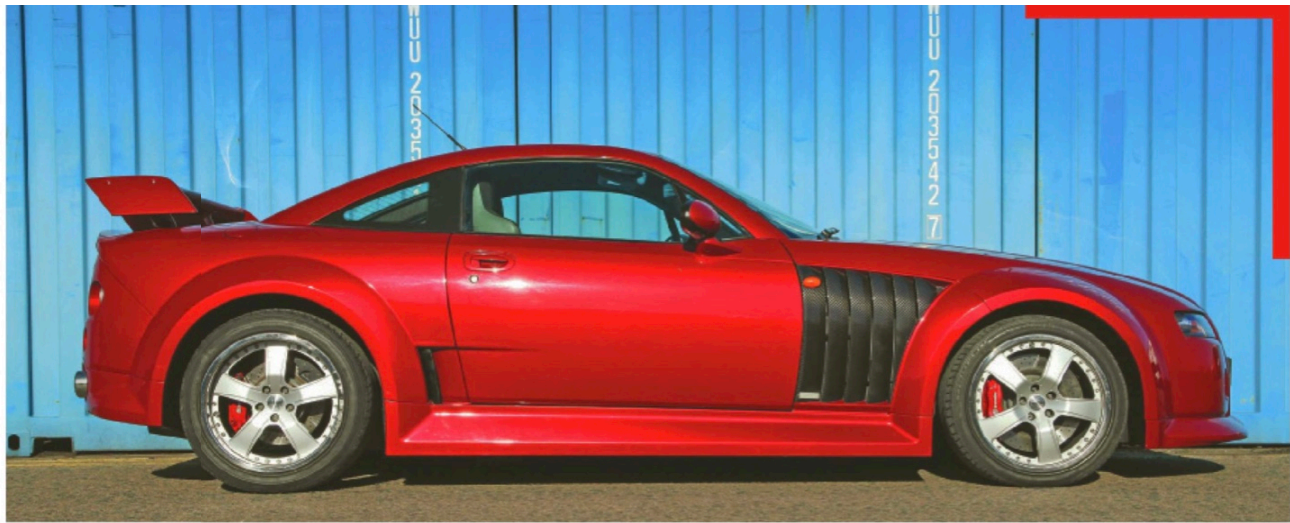
PRESERVING MG'S RICH HERITAGE



RED HOT LADY IN RED

Cars, boats, planes and all manner of other machinery are regularly referred to as 'she' rather than 'it'. Sometimes it is hard to see why, but the SVR is one car that fully deserves its feminine epithet. **Words and pictures: Andrew Starkey**





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hy do we insist on referring to inanimate objects as feminine? Boats, planes, trains and cars all get the 'she' treatment. 'She's a real beauty,' we say when gazing at the lines of an expensive or rare motor car. It's a lot of metal, plastic, rubber and maybe carbon fibre, but to many it is most certainly female. I have my own

theory about the romance of ownership and how the marketing gurus fill us with a desire that makes us feel the way we do about our cars, and after visiting Stan Alexandrowicz I know exactly why he considers his SVR to be a lady.

I met Stan recently at his place of work near his home in Walsall, to see in the flesh for the first time an MG SVR. After a little chat in the office, Stan took me through to the back of his industrial unit and said with particular pride: 'There she is.' And he was right, there SHE was. I understood completely in that second why we use the feminine term when talking cars.

But number 152 and one of only four righthand drive versions in this colour, this SVR is staggeringly attractive, to me at any rate. It made my heart leap a little, and then almost go into full cardiac arrest when Stan turned the key.

The car pushes all those blokey buttons, you see. There are beautiful curves, a long bonnet and a big, lusty 5-litre V8 sending 385 horses through to the rear wheels. And there's the noise, a gorgeous rib cage rattling rumble that turns into a more than impressive baneful howl at the press of the pedal. Plenty of cars have this recipe, but the SVR seemed to have a little extra something. I felt a sense of patriotic pride, as you do when you think of a Battle of Britain Spitfire or Concorde perhaps. You see, this car represents what the chaps at MG were capable of. OK, I know the chassis is Italian and the engine is American, but to me it's so British and proves that we can make great heart thumping stuff, cars that have, well, soul.

So, let's return to Stan's Red Hot Lady (Red Hot is the colour by the way). This was the first time I'd actually got hands-on

Above left: The SV got Ford's 4.6-litre V8, but the SVR got the bigger 5-litre version that pushes out 385bhp.

Above: The profile is near perfect, but Andrew wonders if bigger wheels would help complete the package.



Above: Andrew was well impressed with the design, fit and finish of the interior. He wasn't even bothered by the presence of some switchgear borrowed from slightly more mundane models, but then again he wasn't paying £83,000 for a new SVR!

with an SVR, and I wasn't disappointed. The carbon fibre body is very, very pretty indeed and far better looking than the De Tomaso Bigua and Qvale Mangusta from which the SVs are descended. I felt there were some aspects of the design that seemed a tad familiar. Did that front end remind me of a Vauxhall Monaro? And is there a hint of TVR in the rear too? Who cares? It, sorry, 'she' looks great and Stan is justifiably proud to own such a car.

He actually saw this car advertised back in June 2012. 'The seller wanted way too much for her,' Stan explains. 'I didn't even go to view the car at that time; I knew it was just too much money.' Stan was already the owner of two MGs, a V8 MGB and an MGRV8. I'm sure you can see a trend developing here? 'I love MGs and V8s,' he admits. Really Stan? I wouldn't have guessed! 'It's just the combination of complete Britishness and the V8 sound track,' he adds.

Six months after dismissing the SVR ad, Stan received a phone call asking if he was still interested in it. Stan's retort was succinct: 'I am, but not at that price.' The caller didn't hang up, and so after a bit of pre-sale bartering Stan agreed to view the car a week or so later. Now, I don't know if you believe in omens or divine intervention, but during that week Stan paid a visit to a local Birmingham-based car hi-fi specialist looking for technical help on one of his cars. During the idle banter that all car nuts get into and at which our wives just frown, talk of MG SVs entered the conversation. By coincidence the hi-fi chap had

just sold his silver SV, but had retained the private plate.

Stan snapped the plate up in the hope he would soon have the right car to put it on. Somebody or something was telling Stan the SVR was soon to be his – and it was. The viewing a week later resulted in a deal being struck. Stan's wife (obviously a very tolerant lady) suggested he go home first to think the deal through. What she didn't know was that Stan had come prepared with a handsome deposit. She soon cottoned on to that fact however, when he said: 'Too late chuck, the deal's done.' Nothing like keeping your other half in the loop, is there? Nothing like it at all...

After the shock, she did however insist that one of his other MGs must depart for pastures new to make room for Stan's latest acquisition. 'I sold the RV8 begrudgingly,' says Stan. 'Diane was right though, I was showing signs of becoming a little too avid a collector of expensive toys.'

Back to our photoshoot and I had stood there in awe for a while. Now it was time to look a little closer at this car. A peek under the titchy bonnet revealed the all-alloy Ford V8 32-valve engine. It looked a little tight in there, but I'm told that the whole front can be removed with relative ease. The V8 sits just behind the centreline of the front wheels, just where it should be to assist in a better handling and weight distribution.

Further back, the cockpit was proof that us Brits can create a good looking, practical and comfortable driving environment. It was well appointed, and the fit and finish was of a very high





standard. The half leather Sparco seats adjusted in all directions, which is just as well as I'm a proper short arse when it comes to sports cars. There wasn't a clue to the fact that there was a built-in roll bar as part of the chassis because it was all very well disguised behind well-fitted trim. The knobs, buttons and switches have a welcome familiarity to them as they are MG derived. That might have disappointed somebody paying £83,000 for a brand new SVR, but personally I could see nothing wrong with it at all.

On the move, the car reminds you in no uncertain terms that there is a lot of power available. The torque is every bit as tremendous as you'd hope from a big V8. It is delivered by the



Above: Stan Alexandorwic has a soft spot for V8 MGs, and his only regret in buying this lovely SVR lady is that he had to sell his RV8 to make way for it.



shovel full from very low down the rev range, and it just keeps coming. Stan often finds pulling away in second in the wet can save the embarrassment of sitting there with the wheels spinning! The clutch is quite heavy and the gearbox requires a definite and precise action – I can see why Jeremy Clarkson managed to miss third gear when driving one on *Top Gear*. I'm sure it's something you become accustomed to though, and what does he know about driving anyway...? The speed is a little deceptive, too. The engine induction note is nothing short of symphonic and the exhausts accompany this masterful music with their own baritone chorus. All this, coupled with very little wind noise, means you can easily become speed trap fodder helping to fund the next speed bump to disfigure our roads. You really do have to keep an eye on the speedo.

Some experts (and I'm not one, I can assure you) may cast derision on the ride quality. I found it taught but not track stiff, confident but with a little body roll. My impression was that the SVR has more a Grand Tourer feel to it than a bone shaking race bred track monster, and I think that's OK. Stan does too. 'She's just too rare to take on the track anyway,' he says, 'but I'm planning a nice road trip through France in a year or so.' That's more like it, and those seats would let you do it too.

The steering is quick and responsive with respectable feedback. You can of course help your choice of direction by prodding the throttle a little harder for some instant tail out, hooliganised over-steer. Not that I'd be an advocate of such tomfoolery of course. However, I do have just one issue. It's only an opinion and I'm happy for you to disagree, but it's the wheels. They are the proper OZ split rims, 8in wide at the front and 10in at the back. They're 18in diameter, and yet they seem a little small under those beefy arches and, dare I say, just a little dated. Like I say, it's just my impression and I guess the car would lose some of its originality if they were changed. Besides, they did look better moving than when stood still.

All in all Mr Stevens, the designer, has done a pretty darn good job at producing something quite special, made even more so by the fact that production was cut short when the rug wasn't just pulled from under the group, but torn up and thrown back in their faces. I'm not going to go into all the political and legal shenanigans and shameful short sightedness that led to the demise of MG-Rover, followed by Will Riley's misguided attempts at keeping the SV project alive, but it is fair to say that the idea of the SV range being the halo model for MG was a good one, albeit just too late. I only wish the Chinese owners shared this sentiment, and thought that 'she' – or some lady like her – was worthy of a second chance. ©

