



“Can you remember any other cars that debuted at the 2002 Motor Show?”

HOW TO BUY...

MG SV

An exotic carbon fibre-bodied supercar is not your normal MG fare, so could you and should you consider buying one of the 86 that were built?

Words and photography: Russ Smith

There are still some who consider the money MG-Rover spent building a supercar would have been better spent elsewhere; that it was a bit like putting up a marquee for a party while your house is burning down. But in reality the project was a drop in the financial ocean, and a well-intended attempt to generate excitement and publicity for the successfully revived brand.

The project was led by McLaren F1 designer, Peter Stevens, who described it as: ‘A focussed, high-performance sports car for drivers who think TVRs are for wimps.’ As a shortcut to its creation, MG-Rover bought the rights to the Qvale Mangusta (formerly a De Tomaso project), a roadster with a superb chassis and Ford Mustang running gear.

Using a slightly revised chassis from the supplier of all Ferrari’s steel chassis – Vaccari & Bossi – Stevens re clothed it with a strikingly aggressive coupé body. And in a move that would ensure the SV lived up to the prices being asked, that body was moulded in super-strong and lightweight carbon-fibre – a guaranteed headline grabber that also compensated for the quite substantial chassis.

The Mustang running gear was retained, with its aluminium quad-cam 4.6-litre V8 in 320bhp trim, and a prototype was dressed up for launch

at the 2002 NEC Motor Show. Can you remember any other cars that debuted at that year’s show? I thought not. Despite the projected price of £75,000 (later lowered to £67,750), an encouraging 29 orders were taken at the show, but though some were built earlier for insiders and ‘preferred’ buyers, it would be March 2004 before any were ready for real customers. That month also saw the announcement of the £82,950 SV-R version, an even more performance-focussed machine with its Sean Hyland-built five-litre 385bhp engine, uprated brakes and six-speed gearbox option.

Sadly we all know what happened a year later, by which time the always expected low production volume had seen just 35 SVs and 23 SV-Rs being built in RHD, plus another three with a supercharged 4.6 engine that was due to be launched as the SV-S in May 2005. Another 25 LHD examples were made – all SV-Rs – most of which are in Europe.

Since the demise of MG-Rover the SV has been rarely seen and little understood. But they are well looked after thanks to the online community at www.mgsv-club.com. This not only contains all known details of every individual car built, it’s also here and on the site’s active forum that you can learn about the cars’ various little foibles and how to fix them.

TRIM



Left: Many of the interior fittings and fixtures are adapted from more mundane vehicles.

As with most low volume specialist cars, many parts bins have been raided for fixtures and fittings, so replacements for things that break should be easy and cheap to come by. Door handles are MG-F with an extra switching part added; inside ones are Rover 75, as is much of the switchgear and the door mirrors, though they are mounted on different bases. Those high-tech headlamps are actually late Fiat Punto, and the rear lights are Fiat Coupé with added aluminium bezels.

There are thankfully few electronic gadgets to cause problems – even the aircon has manual rotary controls rather than the digital operation common to many modern cars. Behind it all is an electrical system that will be familiar to anyone who has worked on an MG ZT or Rover 75.

The most common problem is with the frameless door windows, which automatically drop a bit when you operate the handle. This facility, which helps sealing, disappears if the battery is disconnected or goes flat (not uncommon) but can be

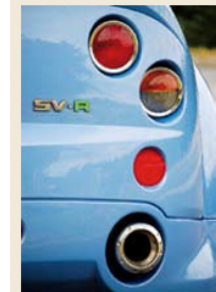
reprogrammed easily enough. There are details on how to do it on the SV Club website.

Some cars were specced with half-Alcantara seat facings. This looks good and feels more comfortable than standard leather, but doesn’t wear as well and is a dirt magnet, so watch for this on higher mileage SVs.

INITIAL CHECKS

First, find a car. With such low build numbers, it was no surprise to hear Luffield MG’s David Wood say that you’ll rarely find more than three or four SVs for sale at any one time. He recommends the best place to start looking is the www.pistonheads.com website. Also worth checking, and definitely your first port of call once you’ve located a car you want to look at, has to be www.mgsv-club.com. Most ads will mention the car’s chassis number (and if not a quick call should elicit that), so you can check on the spec, build details and history before travelling to see it. This is well worth doing as it seems no two SVs were created identical.

That should also clear up most of the anomalies surrounding build and registration dates. As you can see, the ex-2004 Motor Show SV-R in the photos was only registered in 2009, having been mostly used for display purposes before that. A fair number of cars had either not been sold or completed by the time MG-Rover went bust, and have since been bought from the administrators. Oakfields finished off the last eight LHD cars and sold them off early in 2009, and there were plenty of other similar cases in the intervening years. Also, at the time of writing five chassis numbers are unaccounted for and may well turn up at some point.



Those carbon-fibre body panels may never rust, but even minor impact damage brings its own problems as proper repairs are a specialist job. Companies that fix race cars should be equipped to help, but don’t underestimate the cost of putting right any cracks or scrapes you see.

Take a look at the chassis, if possible by getting the car on a ramp. Quite a few owners report surface rust and paint flaking off in all sorts of places. Some cars will have had these areas treated and coated with rustproof, which is a bonus for you, but should be considered essential for all SVs.

BRAKES/SUSPENSION

The big brakes were supplied by Brembo, so replacement parts are easy enough to get, though not cheap. Inspect the discs for wear and excessive scoring, and on the test drive make sure the car pulls up dead straight and quickly. Anything else points to seized caliper pistons, which can happen on cars that have stood around a lot. Have the seller fix that or knock the price down a bit. There are no reported problems with the suspension, but it's still worth listening out for knocks on bumpy roads when testing.

About the only other area for bartering here is wheels and tyres. The latter wear pretty quickly—especially at the rear if the car's being used properly—and should be the original spec Michelin Pilot Sports, not a cheaper option. Expect to pay around £250 each for these. The stainless steel trim rings on the wheels are vulnerable to damage and hard to find replacements for as the style became obsolete in 2003. However, the SV Club has located some supplies, but at £70-£75 per rim it's at least a bartering point.

Right: The box frame chassis is immensely strong, but carbon fibre panels help keep kerb weight down to just 1540kg.



Left: Rear wing was a £2000 option in 2004; those distinctive side gilles were also £500 in alloy or body colour, £1000 in carbon finish.



Right: Despite its convoluted progress from concept to production, Stevens' design gave the SV a true MG family resemblance.

ENGINE

The aluminium Mustang V8 may sound high-tech, but they have been proved tough and reliable over very high mileages, so a properly serviced 4.6 will probably outlast the car. There's no evidence to back this yet, but it may be that the more highly stressed and hand built 5.0-litre units in the SV-R don't stay the course quite so well, but even if it did need

replacing, you wouldn't face anything like the sort of bills that scare Ferrari and Lamborghini owners. Most of these cars were fitted with a Ford five-speed gearbox and it doesn't possess the smoothest of shifts, so if it feels a bit clunky and obstructive, that's perfectly normal. There is a rumour that they free up a bit with age, but we've not tried a high

mileage example. Some of the SV-Rs had an optional Tremec six-speed manual 'box and the shift on this requires a bit of muscle too. That may make the automatic a better bet for some people, and there were a few of these sold. It's an equally trouble-free unit as the manual, and works well with the engine's enormous torque.

Right: Big and impressive brakes were supplied by Brembo, so sourcing replacement parts is easy, if not cheap.



Right: Ford V8 engine has been proven to be tough and long-lived in a variety of applications.



MODIFICATIONS

The obvious way to make an SV go even faster (as MG were going to do it) is to fit a supercharger. We have it on good authority that the Kenne Bell kits from America (www.kennebell.net) fit under the standard bonnet and boost power to around 400bhp for the 4.6 and getting on for 500bhp with the 5.0, though some have played around and got even more! On a more modest level, a 'Trackday' exhaust was offered as an option for original cars and can still be found. It probably extracts a bit more power, and sounds fantastic at first, but does get a bit

wearing on motorway journeys. There's also the problem that it gets loud to the tune of 105 decibels, which is above the limit allowed at a lot of track days. Given the problems with batteries going flat on SVs, especially as they are hardly everyday cars, most owners use a trickle charger that plugs into the cigarette lighter socket. The main reason for flat batteries in the early days was the ECU constantly beaming out signals. Many cars have had this facility disabled, but it's worth asking about the car you are considering.

Below:
Performance is in true supercar territory, but few supercars are so easy to jump in and drive.



DRIVING

With such a normal upright and comfortable driving position, plenty of headroom and a good view out all round, how can this possibly be a supercar? Press the starter button and you begin to find out. The eager woofing burble from the exhaust has more than a hint of menace, and delivers on its promise as soon as you find a good enough stretch of tarmac to let it loose on. The SV-R flashes past 60mph in under five seconds, though sadly, without a test track we had to lift off long before discovering where the wall of power might tail off. Only the heavy and far from smooth gear shift slowed proceedings at all, but this was a very low mileage car and that may well free up in time.

The enormous disc brakes are the most impressive I've encountered on any car, shedding speed in an instant with plenty of feel from the pedal. Only a lunatic could get the traction control to kick in – in the dry at least – and the car changes direction and holds its line through corners with reassuring ease. Biggest surprise was how good the ride is, dealing well with all but the most rutted roads. Overall, there are few cars with such power and ability that are so easy to jump in and drive.



Above: Gear change can be clunky, though it may loosen up in time.



Above: Side vents were available in a variety of finish options.

COST

As a guide, David Wood reckons £24,000-£28,000 is about right for an SV at the moment, depending largely on how little mileage it's covered. That tallies with the £27,000 we've seen an 11,000-mile sell for recently, and the £30,000 being asked for a 6000-mile. Add another £4000 for an SV-R, but be prepared to pay a premium for something with

extra provenance. The asking price on the 2004 MotorShow car in the photos, for instance, with just 1325 miles on the clock, is £39,995. One of the three supercharged cars was also offered recently at £49,995!

Specialist cars like this need specialist servicing, but that's probably not as expensive as you might expect. Luffield MG are considered the best

place to take your SV (they were chosen to carry out the pre-delivery inspections on the eight recently completed LHD cars mentioned earlier). They charge £239.64 for a 5000 mile A service, and recommend a B service be carried out every year at £329.53. There's also a C service at 30,000-mile intervals which is slightly more.

SPECIFICATIONS

	MG SV	MG SV-R
Engine	4601cc, V8, DOHC	4966cc, V8, DOHC
Power	320bhp @ 6000rpm	385bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque	302lb/ft @ 4750rpm	375lb/ft @ 4750rpm
Top speed	165mph	175mph
0-60mph	5.3secs	4.9secs
Fuel cons.	22mpg	21mpg
Gearbox	5-spd man	5/6-spd man

NEED TO KNOW

- n Luffield MG, Loughborough, Leics, 01509 216100, www.luffield.com
- n MG Car Club, www.mgcars.org.uk
- n MG Owners Club, www.mgownersclub.co.uk
- n Thanks to: David Wood of Luffield MG for providing the SV-R in the photos along with much time and advice.



Above: Mirrors were lifted from Rover 75, but with different bases.