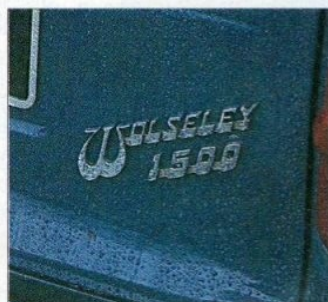
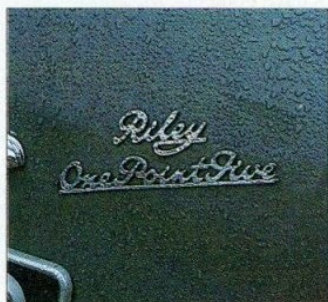


Not only do the Wolseley 1500 and Riley 1.5 offer wood and leather luxury in a compact bodysell, but they're reliable, practical and economical too.

Nick Larkin gives buying advice

Compact set

Photos by Glyn Barney



TIME has shown that BMC definitely made the right decision by abandoning its big plans for the car which became the Wolseley 1500 and its Riley-badged sister, the 1.5. It was originally intended to replace the Morris Minor!

Eventually the uprated Minor 1000, launched in 1956, won the day, but not before considerable BMC cash had been poured into what would probably have been called the Morris 1200.

Rather than being left with a stillborn baby, BMC decided to go ahead with the new car as well, though the original ideals were revised. No longer was it to be a mere Morris, but a

more upmarket offering with a bigger engine.

Riley enthusiasts were initially baying for BMC's blood when the 1.5 appeared, hating the idea of their favourite marque's precious name being sullied with such a machine. But it was a car with a sumptuous interior and, thanks to its twin SU carbs and big valves, was capable of comfortable 80mph cruising.

The Wolseley was more pedestrian, but still, thanks to the relatively light weight it had to carry around, offered good performance compared with many of its contemporaries.

BMC Australia produced its own versions of the car, in Austin, Morris and Wolseley guises.

Today in the UK there are still reasonable numbers of all these models from which to choose, and they're fairly inexpensive to buy, simple to maintain, and cheap to run.

But you have to be extremely careful when buying!



BUYING

WOLSELEY 1500/RILEY 1.5



Above, brothers in all but name – Wolseley (on left) and Riley

HISTORY

INDULGENCES such as these two new additions to the BMC range could be afforded by the company only if they used existing mechanicals, so the well-tried 1489cc BMC B-series engine was chosen. The cars were also designed around the Minor's



floorpan, though the remainder of the bodysells were completely new.

The Wolseley was unveiled in April 1957, the Riley in November of the same year. Keenly priced, the cars were





instantly successful. They had no direct competitors offering the same levels of luxury in such compact dimensions; the closest rivals were the Singer Gazelle and Sunbeam Rapier.

Few changes were made to the 1500 and 1.5 during their production runs, which lasted until April 1965.

In 1959, the Wolseley was joined by a cheaper 'Fleet' model, which had Vynide rather than leather upholstery and featured other interior economy measures.

Then, in May 1960, Mk II models appeared. Changes were confined to such exciting developments as internal bootlid and bonnet hinges, revised chrome trim and a parcel shelf being provided under the fascia.

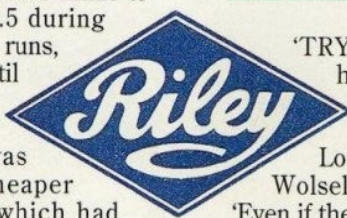
Only a year elapsed before Mk III models showed up, with larger rear lights, side grilles at the front and suspension lowered by one inch.

Crankshaft changes came in 1962, along with a slight

increase in front-seat legroom.

And that was more or less it in terms of development until we said goodbye to both cars.

BUYING



'TRY to buy an honest, original car,' says Andy Bradley, of London-based firm Wolseley 1500 Spares.

'Even if there's a bit of rust, at least you know what you're letting yourself in for.'

As we will see, you could be letting yourself in for quite a lot, as these cars certainly rot.

The mechanical side is much more straightforward, and spares are not really a problem. Replacement body sections are widely available.



Rileys enjoy a price premium over Wolseleys, have a marked performance advantage and more luxurious interiors.

Though the cars have some parts in common with the Morris Minor, don't be fooled into thinking that everything is

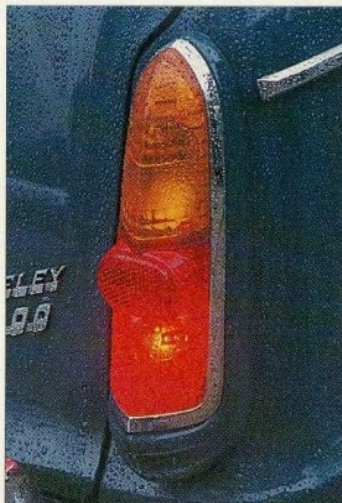
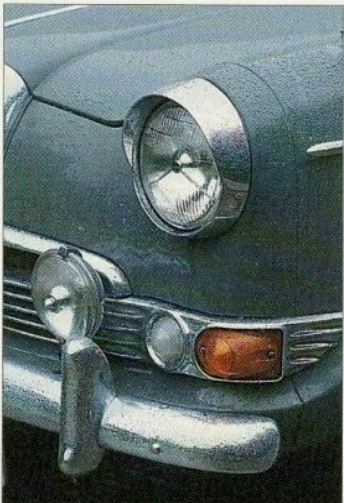
interchangeable. Andy says: 'They're not as much like a Minor as people tend to think.'

BODYWORK

SIT and brace yourself for a long lecture, as you can never be too careful when checking the bodywork on these cars, which can surrender to rust in several hidden places.

What you can see may be gleaming, but many a nasty can lurk, and there are many people, including knowledgeable enthusiasts, who have had unpleasant surprises when they've taken their new purchases home.

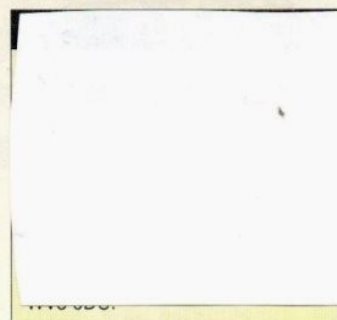
You may as well begin underneath the car. Firstly, make a close inspection of the



Far left, extra chromework is one of the Riley's features

SPECIALISTS

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With engines tuned to MGA standards, Riley 1.5s were competent racers

front crossmember underneath the radiator, then the front chassis legs where the engine is supported.

Next for scrutiny is the crossmember beneath the front seats, paying particular attention to the torsion bar mounting points. Also look for nasties around the rear spring hangers.

Once you've crawled out from beneath the car, make a particularly close inspection of the inner wings and the area around them. Look also at the area surrounding the front suspension bump stop.

Outer front wings can go around the headlights and front seams. Look carefully at the lower rear wings, where there's a mud trap, and also the rear wheelarches.

The door bottoms are also notorious for rust, but



replacements are available.

If there's rot on the outer sills you can guarantee further horrors around the inner membrane and probably the inner sill too.

One way of checking for hidden rust is by removing the carpet around the inner sill inside the front footwell. As this is glued on, don't forget to ask the owner's permission! Underneath, you'll find several metal discs which can be removed so you can probe between the sills.

While we would not suggest you buy a car needing major work, be aware that repair sections are available for the most important areas.

Another specialist in these cars, John Foster, of Heckmondwike, West Yorkshire (0924 409319), supplies a wide range of body and mechanical spares, including three inner wing repair sections, at between £19.50 and £37 plus VAT. A whole inner wing can also be supplied, and a D-post repair section for £46.

Wolseley 1500 Spares (081 393 2194) offer, among other things, outer sills at £26 (templates are supplied free for the inner ones on receipt of an SAE), front crossmembers for £35, door arches at £18 and rear wing lower-half repair sections for £60 a side.

Wings are £280 a side,

True **WOLSELEY** craftsmanship



Wolseley's B-series engine is less highly tuned of the duo, offering 50bhp compared with Riley's 68bhp

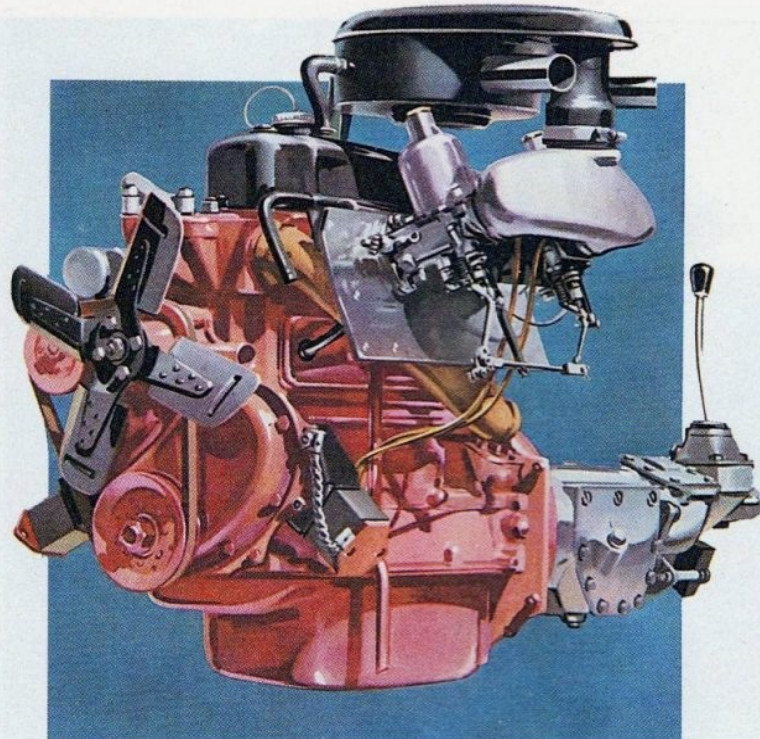
but for £38 you can have glassfibre ones, which Andy Bradley admits are hardy distinguishable from the metal ones once they're painted. It would appear worth getting these until you can spot new or excellent secondhand metal replacements at an autojumble or scrapyard.

RUNNING GEAR

YOU can't go too far wrong with BMC's B-series engine, though watch for excessive smoking, rattles and low oil pressure when hot. Replacements are easily available. Wolseley 1500 Spares usually have at least

three rotted-out cars for breaking, and will do you an engine for £90-£110.

Gearboxes are reliable old BMC units, too, and shouldn't cause problems, though check for worn synchromesh,



Minor, but the kingpins aren't. These can present a problem, though specialists and

plus VAT, and reconditioned steering racks at £58.50. He'll rebuild engines to customers' specifications.

The cars also share the Morris Minor's infamous front-wheel-collapse syndrome, caused by lack of lubrication on the front swivel pins.

The differentials are interchangeable with those of the Moggie, but the ratios are different. Halfshafts are Minor, and are prone to breaking if the car is abused.

There are drum brakes all round. The brake linings are larger on the Riley, but these

'A Wolseley or a Riley is all you could want at the price'

particularly on second. Mk III boxes have stronger bearings.

The suspension trunnions are the same as on a Morris

enthusiasts should be able to help with difficulties.

John Foster offers exchange stub axle assemblies for £45,

SPECIFICATION

Wolseley 1500 Riley 1.5

Built	1957-'65	1957-'65
Engine	4-cyl ohv	4-cyl ohv
Capacity	1498cc	1498cc
Bore/stroke	73 x 88.9mm	73 x 88.9mm
Max power	50bhp @ 4200rpm	68bhp @ 5400rpm
Transmission	4-speed manual	4-speed manual
Steering	Rack-and-pinion	Rack-and-pinion
Brakes	Drum	Drum
Suspension	F: ind, torsion bar, wishbones R: semi-elliptic leaf spring	F: ind, torsion bar, wishbones R: semi-elliptic leaf spring
Length	12ft 8in	12ft 9in
Width	5ft 1in	5ft 1in
Max speed	77.5mph	83.5mph
0-60mph	24sec	17sec
Fuel cons	26-32mpg	28-35mpg



Wolseley less lavish inside than Riley but still well trimmed



are interchangeable between both cars.

INTERIOR

THESE cars were, as we have said, extremely well-appointed inside, particularly the Riley.

This can mean high repair bills and would perhaps make a car with an awful interior not worth buying.

Cars are still being broken so you may find a set of seats, but don't count on it.

A complete carpet set from a specialist outlet will cost around £75.

INSURANCE

HAPPY news here, definitely. Lancaster Insurance Services (0480 484848) quote the following prices for a 34-year-old man living in Banbury, Oxfordshire.

You'll pay £61 for 1500 miles

a year, £82 to cover 3000 and £99 for 5000.

WHAT TO PAY

NEITHER of these cars has ever really had the investors' chequebooks waving and, for what you get, they are extremely good value.

An excellent Riley won't cost you much more than £2000, and a Wolseley is going to be around £500 cheaper. A Riley is tuned practically to MGA standards, but whether it's worth the price premium over the Wolseley is very much up to the individual.

Base-model Wolseleys are now rare, but this certainly isn't reflected in their price.

A usable Riley is yours for £1200 or so, and try £900 for a Wolseley.

Less than that will buy you something in which to run around, though major work may be on the horizon.

Cars suffering severe corrosion aren't really worth any more than their scrap value, unless you really have the urge for a restoration challenge.

CONCLUSION

OVERALL, these cars are an excellent option – provided you buy a sound example. The odd excursion with a grease gun and rust inhibitor means you have a vehicle suitable for everyday use.

As specialist John Foster comments: 'They are an ideal low-priced classic car. You don't have to pay much to get a good one, they're so simple and ideal for DIY maintenance, they're economical and have good performance.'

Though the Wolseley doesn't have the Riley's performance, it's still far from slow and you'll have extra economy with none of the potential problems of troublesome twin carburettors.

The styling is not greatly inspiring but neat; interior room isn't abundant but there's a large boot adding to the practicality.

You can also easily uprate your car with

goodies such as front disc brakes and an anti-roll bar.

Two clubs and a couple of specialists cater for these cars, meaning mechanical and important body spares are easily available.

A Wolseley or a Riley is all you could want for the price, really, but the dreaded rust could mean a four-wheeled nightmare if you're not careful.

There's a fair number of these cars around, so hold out for a good one. ■



Riley trim parts now scarce; steer clear of cars with poor interiors

