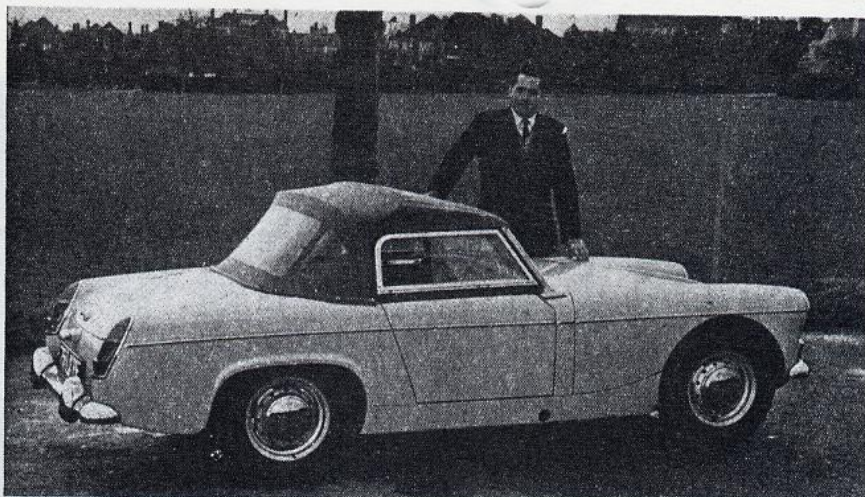


"OUR JACK" with his latest creation—a real wolf in sheep's clothing (the MG-Climax, not J. Brabham).

Ex-champ has devised an engine swap that turns new MG Midget into a giant-killer, writes David Phipps after a private tryout



MG-CLIMAX FROM BRABHAM

JACK BRABHAM has done it again! First the Herald-Climax, now a Climax-engined Midget—and this time the results are even more amazing.

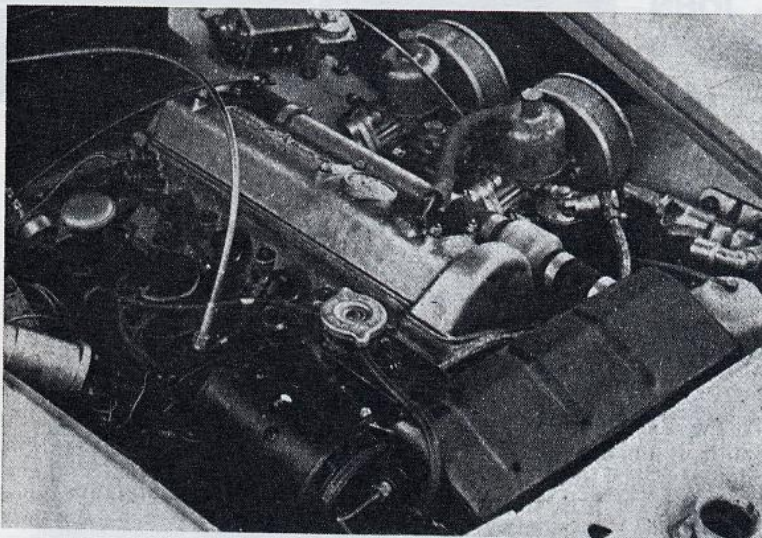
In bare figures, an 80 percent power boost improves acceleration from 0 to 50 m.p.h. by over 100 percent, halves the time required to go from 40 to 60 m.p.h. in top gear, and raises maximum speed by 25 m.p.h. On the road it turns a pleasant, good-handling but not particularly lively little roadster into a real high-performance sports car.

For all its implications, the Brabham conversion for the Midget is remarkably simple. It consists merely of replacing the standard engine and clutch with a 1216c.c. Coventry-Climax FWE unit and a special 7½-inch clutch. (Surprising as it may seem, the Climax engine is 40lb. lighter than the B.M.C. unit, with beneficial effects on weight distribution.) An 8000 r.p.m. tachometer is also supplied, and total price of the conversion, fitted, is £360stg.

The test car also had disc brakes on the front wheels and an anti-roll bar — both of which are recommended optional extras — and 5.60 by 13in. Dunlop B7 tyres, the latter mainly to ensure safety at speeds in excess of 100 m.p.h.

Naturally, the conversion is also applicable to the Midget's twin brother, the Austin-Healey Sprite, in both Mark I and Mark II form. In fact, the most obvious application of this conversion would seem to be a used Mark I Sprite, which could probably be obtained and converted at a total cost only £100 above that of a new Midget or Mark II Sprite.

The Climax FWE, a four-cylinder, single-overhead-camshaft unit, has a very good reputation following years of extremely successful racing. As fitted to the Midget, it produces 83 b.h.p. at 6400 revs, yet is even more flexible than the standard MG engine. It also compares very favorably in terms of fuel economy, starts easily from cold, warms up quickly and



CLIMAX fits neatly in Midget's bay, is 40lb. lighter than normal unit but gives 80 percent more power. Theoretical maximum is 112 m.p.h.

shows no sign of temperament in city traffic.

On the Road

As can be imagined, with the free-revving Climax engine allied to the agility of the Midget, this is a most enjoyable car to drive — as I found when Jack lent me one for a tryout.

Seating position is good, and pedals, instruments and minor controls are all well placed. The test car's appearance was enhanced by the fitting of a three-spoke wood-rim steering-wheel. Even with the top up, visibility is quite good for a car of this type.

The great thing about the Climax-engined Midget is that it can take advantage of the smallest gaps to pass slow-moving traffic. All its responses are immediate: it goes where it is pointed, and it does so quickly. This applies even if top gear is used most of the time.

The keen driver is not likely to

stay permanently in top, however, for the gearshift is very pleasant, and the standard gear ratios seem absolutely ideal for the Climax engine, giving maximum speeds (at 7000 r.p.m.) of 35 m.p.h. in first, 58 in second and 81 in third.

On paper, 7000 r.p.m. in top represents 112 m.p.h., which the car might reach under favorable conditions in hardtop form. The modified brakes are fully able to cope with the performance and seem immune to fade in normal use. The lights are adequate for fast night driving — but the low build of the car causes some oncoming drivers to object to the dipped beams.

It says much for the basic Midget that the Climax-engined version will run straight and true at over 90 m.p.h. in very windy weather, and that the roadholding is in no way

MG - CLIMAX

impaired by the much-increased power output.

Roadholding, in fact, is extremely good on smooth surfaces, and handling is almost up to sports/racing standards — thanks to the Midget's very precise steering and an anti-roll bar which virtually eliminates this model's characteristic roll over-steer.

On bumpy corners, however, the

car tends to hop about somewhat and the ride is generally rather firm — as on all Midgets and Sprites. Brabham now plans to soften the rear springs — to improve both roadholding and ride — and also fit a Panhard rod.

Besides the disc brakes and an anti-roll bar, I would recommend fitting a hardtop as another essential adjunct for fast motoring. The standard soft top is extremely noisy at anything over 80 m.p.h. It also tends to lift away from the top of the windscreen at higher-than-standard speeds, but is prevented from blowing off by

fasteners at each end of the screen. The exhaust note also becomes rather obtrusive at over 5000 r.p.m., although the Midget muffler is very effective at lower engine speeds.

Externally, the Midget-Climax is indistinguishable from a standard model. This feature, in conjunction with its ability to out-accelerate all mass-produced sports cars under 3 litres, will give it a special appeal for many people. And for anyone who wants a fast, small sports car with character, Jack's latest creation could well be the answer. ● ● ●

