



MODS & CONSEQUENCES (1980-1991)

AUSTIN METRO

Great to drive and with hatchback practicality, upgrading the Metro is easy, cheap – and fun

Head to the British Motor Museum this Sunday (4 June) and you'll find plenty of these pint-sized classics at the National Metro and Mini Show – and you'll find that owners use all of sorts of clever tricks to make the 1980s hatchback better than ever.

It helps that the Metro shares its engine and gearbox with the Mini, so there are virtually limitless upgrades. Most are inexpensive and within the grasp of the DIY-er.

Many of the upgrades mentioned in our Mini guide (CCW, 1 March) apply here too. Over and above that, the standard MG Metro airbox is better than the Austin alternative and has a better cold air feed tube as standard. The MG's camshaft is also ideal if you're building a fast road car, but why not just fit an MG engine?

This 73bhp unit is a straight swap for the standard 63bhp 1.3-litre in the Austin Metro while the 1.0-litre powerplant is rated at just 42bhp or 48bhp, depending on compression ratio. Whatever you fit, a reworked cylinder head is key to better breathing and a water-to-oil heat exchanger from a later Metro will reduce engine bay temperatures.

Getting the Hydragas suspension displacers refurbished will probably pay dividends. Also, the two rear spheres are linked via a pipe – fitting a valve to each one and removing the pipe firms up the ride.

A thicker front anti-roll bar from a 1985-on car reduces roll, as does a rear anti-roll bar from a Metro Turbo or Metro GTi MkIII. Fabricating a rear brace will also result in a noticeable difference in the corners. Camber isn't easily achieved with the stock suspension but a popular mod is to shorten the suspension rods to lower and stiffen things up.



METRO MAKEOVER
£150+

Beef up a standard car by fitting a Turbo wing extension and front spoiler, though this involves drilling mounting holes in the wings. An original boot spoiler is a relatively easy fit.

HELP IT BREATHE
£140-£225

The standard MG Metro inlet and exhaust manifolds are efficient and they don't need to be changed. If you're after a fruitier sound, Manifold produces a tubular exhaust manifold and set of pipes with one or two back boxes.

ELECTRIC TWEAKS
£275

Metro MkIs have a very simple wiring loom – later ones were more comprehensive and facilitated central door locking motors. Metro MkIs will benefit from fitting relays to the light switch as these can overload and melt.

SWAP ITS WHEELS
£100+

Swap metric wheels for Metro alloys, 12-inch steel rims or 5x13 Minilites – the bolt pattern matches the Mini's but the centre hole doesn't. The rear wheels can be spaced to improve stance but this puts a higher load on the rear radius arm bearings.

BRAKE UPGRADES
£100+

Post-1985 Metros have 8.4-inch vented discs and four-pot calipers up front and rear drums – fitting this to an earlier car is a straight swap. Also check that the brake balancing valve works – if not, the rear wheels will lock up under hard braking.

GO ELECTRIC
£70-£100

Most Metros had Lucas electronic ignition but some early cars got points, which can be swapped for the later type. The electronic set-up came with a variety of economy curves, but this can be changed to improve power.

FUELLING CHANGE
£100+

The 1275cc Metro's standard HIF44 carburettor can be set up for extra power. If you want to go further, there's plenty of room to fit a Weber carb, but you'll need deeper pockets to fit and run a car fitted with this sort of set-up.

EXPERT VIEW



THE FORUM

MARTIN VESTERGAARD
METROPOWER

'Upgrades are readily available off the shelf'

There's a wealth of information on the metropower.info forum. The group's Martin Vestergaard says: 'Most Metros are now reserved for shows but some are still used every day. Most upgrades are for improved reliability or aesthetics, so wheels and spoilers are popular. Carburettor and exhaust upgrades are readily available, making increasing power very easy. Some fit A-series Metros with a K-series engine, but it's a lot of work. Buy one of the later cars if you really want that engine.' metropower.info



THE INSURER

ANDREW EVANSON
LANCASTER
INSURANCE

'Even the standard Metro was great fun'

'Lancaster was originally 'born' out of the MG Owners' Club and even though we're now independent, we're still the exclusive insurance partner to the club, so we remain close to all things MG-related. Both the MG Metro and regular cars were great fun as a standard car so the additional power and stopping ability must make this an entertaining drive! The modifications Ben has made to his car do increase the performance so there would be a small increase in premium with us.' lancasterinsurance.co.uk

I MODDED MINE

BEN PLUMMER

Ben Plummer owns two Metros, one of which is (even) more extreme than the other. Ben says: 'I bought an MG MkI that was going to be scrapped and turned it into a fast-road car with a 1330cc engine, 276-degree cam, Fletcher manifold and Janspeed exhaust. It's also got Revolution 12x5 wheels and four-pot calipers. The result is less of a shopping car and much more fun. My other Metro is an ex-hillclimb machine that's been converted to adjustable AVO coilovers and has a full roll cage and a wide-arch kit. Swapping the suspension over involved a lot of work as the bodysell has to be strengthened, but it's a wonderful car to drive.'



SPECIALISTS

■ **BL Transverse**, London.
020 8654 3069, bltransverse-minimetro.co.uk
■ **Hydragas and Hydrostatic Service**, Telford. 07506 563081, hydragasandhydrostaticservice.com

LANCASTER INSURANCE QUOTE

1989 MG METRO, value £1750. Standard quote: £80.23 or £97.23 with agreed value*. Modified quote: £114.58 or £131.58 with agreed value*.

*Quotes based on a 45-year-old male marketing manager, access to other car, no claims or convictions, club member, 5000 miles per year, living in SP2 OHL. Disclaimer: Policy benefits, features and discounts offered may vary between schemes or cover selected and are subject to underwriting criteria. An additional charge may be payable.



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