



Buying an MGB

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Buying an MGB

The following is based on my response to an email I received from someone who said:

"I don't want some horrible thing I resent constantly spending money on (like any other 'normal' car), so I decided it should be something I will love, and can maintain in the spirit of caring for it."

A person after my own heart - we don't 'own' our cars, we are merely temporary custodians! I have set out the questions and answers below:

Q. The one I am most interested in has been lovingly maintained by an owner forced to relocate overseas. It's a 1977 roadster with a newish gold seal engine with only 13,000 miles and is said to run beautifully. The body is free of any rust and has a 2 yr old soft top.

A. Body condition is everything, mechanicals are relatively cheap and easy to fix. When was it last painted? A quick fill and paint job can cover a multitude of sins only for them to start bubbling out a few months later.

Q. I am looking into some further details about the car...and curious about the insurance rates.

A. Insurance depends on things like owners age, driving experience, location, and intended usage like any other car. For someone in their forties, living in a low crime area, with the car garaged and limited mileage, you could be talking not much more than £100. But for a young person living in a flat, parking on the street and using it as an everyday car then several hundred pounds. Best to get a quote first. There are a number of specialists about like Peart, Lancaster, Footman James etc. They may need to you to be a member of a classic car club like the MG Car or Owners clubs which is beneficial anyway. Always ask about 'agreed value' cover, where you agree the market value of the car and they promise (check this!) to pay out that value in the event of a total loss. Without this you will only get the average value of the car, which can be many thousands of pounds less than the agreed value in the case of even a very good, much less concourse, example.

Q. What I am really interested in is the level (and cost) of constant maintenance it will require and I'm wondering how generally dependable it is likely to be.

A. A classic car will always require more attention than a modern car, they were designed with that in mind, as well as them being up to 40 years old now and parts wearing out. Given the correct level of care and attention there is every reason to expect an MGB to be as reliable as a modern car. For some eight or nine years I relied on a 73 roadster and a 75 V8 and no other cars, and for most of that time I was commuting up to 150 miles per day. In a combined mileage of about 100,000 miles each car has stopped at the roadside once, which (apart from running out of petrol once after having changed a part that made the gauge very inaccurate) I was able to sort out on the spot.

Q. My initial research is showing that parts are generally available in the UK.

A. For a UK spec car I would say that *all* the parts are available here, there are a great many suppliers, but as with anything quality and cost can vary. Having said that the cost of

decent parts for the MGB is often significantly less than the equivalent item for a modern car and sometimes more readily available! Suppliers usually do mail order so even physical distance is not an issue.

Q. I think I have found at least one garage in my new area able to service such a car. The only real concern is having it be more hassle than joy as I am keen to learn about its workings but as of now have exactly no knowledge about cars engines and the like.

A. Paying a garage to keep the car running will be expensive given current labour rates of anywhere from £50-£100 per hour. You would also need to make sure they had experience of classic cars, modern places rely on computer diagnostics which can't be applied to cars like the MGB, and they are used to swapping parts willy-nilly at your cost until they fix the problem. You would be well advised to think in terms of doing as much work as possible yourself - space i.e. garage permitting. It is an easy car to work on and there is plenty of free advice available online as well as from local MGB clubs.

Q. Am I insane to be considering purchasing one?

A. We are all insane to a greater or lesser degree, welcome to the club!

Q. Any advice, insight, warnings, things to look for, avoid etc, would be very much appreciated.

A. I would strongly advise you to get hold of a copy of Lyndsay Porter's 'Guide to Purchase and DIY Restoration of the MGB', republished as 'The MGB Restoration Manual', it does exactly what it says on the cover. They are sometimes available on loan from libraries or for purchase second hand at classic car shows etc, as well as available new. It contains a checklist of what to look out for when buying an MGB and a guide as to how much each costs to put right. I bought both mine using this checklist, as well as looking over, under, round, inside and out, listening, sniffing, driving etc. and in both case I got something slightly better than I expected. People from local MGB clubs will also be happy to go and look at a car with you and give an opinion, I am sure.

Q. Recommendations about preferable years/models vs less preferable ones...

A. Roadsters are more sought after than GTs, chrome-bumpers (up to 74) more than the later 'rubber bumpers'. Amongst the purists the earliest cars with the pull-handles (1962-64) are the most sought after. 1971/72 chrome bumper cars had a curious recessed grill which few like, but many owners have replaced these with the earlier all-chrome grill or the later grill of the same shape which has the chrome surround and black plastic inserts. I have a chrome bumper roadster and a rubber bumper V8 GT, the rubber bumpers are more acceptable on the GT (even more so on the V8 with fatter tyres), and can be more practical on an everyday car - chrome bumpers will not stand up to parking nudges as well.

Q. I am told cars over 25 years old in England are not taxed-does this still apply when the engine has been replaced?

A. The tax-free cut-off is fixed at 1st January 1973. Anything **built** (doesn't matter when it was first registered) before this date is tax free saving £160 per year. It is irrespective of any mechanical or body changes on the car as long as it retains its original chassis number.

Q. Are unleaded conversions preferable in terms of performance?

A. No performance issues either way, but eventually the engine may need to have an unleaded head fitted, typically £150 plus a similar amount to fit. But so far I have not heard of

anyone suffering from the problem that using unleaded fuel on an unmodified engine is supposed to cause - valve seat recession - and that includes North America where it has been in use for 30 years or more. Additives are available here which are said to protect against the problem and give peace of mind for a few pence per gallon, I use Castrol Valvemaster. Super Unleaded or Shell Optimax usually give significantly better performance than basic unleaded, regardless of which head you are using.

Q. Thank you very much for your time.

A. My pleasure. Finally I would say that you **do** have to want to own and run a classic car like the MGB. They have none of the modern 'gizmos', will be colder in winter, probably let the rain in a bit, need more servicing and TLC, parts will need replacing from time to time, and may well break down from time to time which is an indiscretion one can forgive an old lady. However they will give you 'miles of smiles' and are very rewarding. The best advice I ever heard was 'listen to your car, it is talking to you'. Which means get to know how your car looks, sounds, feels and smells and if you notice any change from the norm, investigate it, and that way you will probably spot things before they let you down. And how do you get to know it that well? Just drive, drive and drive it some more :o)

Good luck,
PaulH.

Buying a V8

Bodily the V8 is the same as the 4-cylinder GT and the interior, gearbox, axle, brakes, steering and suspension are much the same (except that on all but the earliest cars OD operates on 4th only) but the engine is very different, of course. The following gives some guidance on how to approach purchasing a V8.

Factory V8s are described as having a high-flow oil system and not a high pressure one, the hot running pressure should be 40psi (ideally reaching that at about 2000 rpm) and hot idle can be as low as 10 or 15, or as an acquaintance with much experience of Police V8s, has said "What hot oil pressure?". They do have a gauge - the twin mechanical oil and temp gauge similar (but different scales) to the 4-cylinder car. They have hydraulic tappets which can give rise to clatter on cold starts and hot idle when they and the cam needs replacement so when up to temp make sure you leave it idling long enough for the electric fans to cut in and out a couple of times. With the handbrake hard on put it into 4th and sloooooowly let the clutch out to drag the revs down to stalling point and listen for any ticking at low revs. If you hear none then fine, but if it starts ticking at very low revs it is an indication that there is **some** wear in the tappets, but not serious. V8s also have a very long oil gauge rise time (and a similarly slow fall time if turned off when still cold) but they should start rising within a second or so of firing up from cold. When viewing tell the owner **not** to start it and run it up to temp before your arrival, you want to be there for the cold start as well as the hot idle. The owners of the two I looked at did, I was surprised at the time, now I think I know why. There shouldn't be leaks of any fluids, even oil. I know 4-cylinder MGBs are said to be leaky but V8s shouldn't be. Oil on the dipstick should be clean and when you remove the oil filler cap and look inside it should be a dark bronze colour if the oil changes have been done properly black crud is bad news. Ask the owner about their oil change regime, hopefully they will say oil and filter replacement every 3000 miles and ideally the use of a pre-change flushing treatment such as Forte or STP. If you buy one and on your first oil change use such a treatment, don't be surprised to see oil that was relatively clean on the dipstick beforehand come out like black water - and very hot!

Idle speed should be about 800 rpm, but it will drop when the fans cut in. I prefer to have mine idling at about 800 when the fans are operating which means it will be closer to 1000 when they are off.

Cooling is marginal, even in the UK, and they will cope much better in the cool of the autumn as compared with the mid-30's we have been having this year (2003). They do run hotter than 4-cylinder cars and whilst the gauge should be on N at cruising speeds in free air it can take a while for it to get back down to that after a period stuck in traffic with the fans running. The fans should cut in and out about mid-way between N and the red H zone on the gauge (although the SU Burlen replacement cuts in before mid-way and doesn't cut out again until nearly back down on N) don't be fussed by this as long as it stays out of the red zone and isn't losing coolant it isn't overheating. Several years ago before I fully fettled my cooling system mine did idle in the red in very hot weather but still had no problems other than a rough idle. Check both fans operate together and if the owner insists on running them from a manual switch to keep the temp gauge down be suspicious. Give it a good run then switch off and make sure it doesn't vomit water out of the overflow after a couple of seconds - indicates possible engine problems or may just be a bad cap (should be 15lb no higher). The overflow shouldn't be directed into a catch-bottle, if it is then maybe it is losing coolant. While waiting for this it is normal to see the temp gauge rise from N possibly as high as mid-way between N and the red zone, but it should rapidly come down again on restarting. When hot you **should** be able to remove the radiator cap slowly and carefully without it boiling over, just some rushing, hissing and gurgling, and the coolant level should be near the top of the expansion tank, and about half-way (you may need a dip-stick) when cold. I have an uprated rad with the same outward appearance as the standard but it didn't make much difference - the 25% uprating refers to the number of tubes but the law of diminishing returns comes into play and there is nowhere near a 25% increasing in cooling. By far the biggest improvement to cooling came from providing a local earth connection to each fan motor instead of relying on the harness earth, and providing a direct feed from the alternator to the fan relay, both as detailed elsewhere on this site. Since doing all that work, and the top-end rebuild which corrected a cooling system problem, I shut mine in the garage (exhaust piped outside) on a 30 degree day and left it idling to see what happened. The air going into the grill was being recirculated from the engine bay rather than being 'fresh' air at ambient and actually got up to 41 degrees, but still the temp gauge never got more than two-thirds the way from N to H. The fans were running full-time and were never going to get it low enough to switch off, but it wasn't getting any higher either.

Fuel consumption can be as low as 10 or 15 mpg if you use a tankful just knocking round town. On a run even at speed you should get 28mpg. One year I came back from Le Mans keeping the speed down to around 65 to 70 and being very gentle on the throttle as it was tending to lose coolant and on that run it did an amazing 320 miles on nearly a tankful or 34mpg. Some years later I travelled from Birmingham to Fort William and back, just under 870 miles. Motorway all the way to and through Glasgow, then just over 100 miles single-carriageway the rest of the way. Not taking it easy like last time but not going too mad either, we achieved over 35 on the motorway, 32 on the single-carriageway, to average 34mpg overall.

The Trials and Tribulations of MG Ownership

Some of the experiences of Herb Adler from Australia:

- o How the TF became a B; getting it running; oil leaks; octagonal nuts; Banjo diff.
- o More banjo diff; more fuel pump; more carbs.
- o Column switches
- o Radio; door alignment
- o Yet more carbs
- o Even more carbs; steering; engine; jack support
- o head off; distributor
- o Still more carbs; registration; gearbox
- o Cooling system enhancements
- o Instrument voltage stabiliser
- o Door latches
- o Central locking - cabling into the doors
- o Central locking - door actuators
- o Alternative gearbox and seats
- o Curing running-on
- o Fitting an arm-rest/cubby
- o Using a Colortune
- o An alternative to the chrome-bumper hydraulic and rubber-bumper mechanical brake light switches
- o Installing rear bump-stops
- o Front wheel-arch liners
- o Snippets - throw-out bearing, exhaust, LED instrument lighting, bonnet release cable, shift-lever boot
- o Reconditioning an SU carb
- o Something to make many of us jealous - a 2-post lift
- o Float valve problems
- o Fuel tank sender problems
- o A 'new' classic joins the stable
- o Head problems
- o Wolseley Heater Fan
- o BB Spring breaks
- o Reflections on Wolseley lights
- o Fuel pump union leak
- o An alternative heater tap for the B
- o Mods to Wooly

But of course it's all worth it in the end:



...

David
Bolton:

- o Ignition woes
- o Fuel pump woes

...

and
Michael
Beswick:

- o How the shrinking Midget became a B
- o Doing what they were made for - driving!

But these all pale into insignificance given Terry's story who despite being completely blind reassembled an abandoned restoration All by Touch. Shortly after completing his first MGB he visited me in Solihull in it. He admitted that building up to the visit he was getting more and more nervous as it was a round-trip of 340 miles, but it was trouble-free.



If that wasn't enough Terry then bought and sold several other MGBs and a Stag, some as runners and some for restoration. One of these was another abandoned restoration, this time of a Mk1 roadster, and again completed it to gain its MOT at the first attempt. That shell required a lot of remedial work by his body man, but that gave him the chance to deal with all the ancillaries, fixtures and fittings.

However between writing the 2011 article and it being published, Terry was rushed to hospital one night after suffering a stroke, and during the tests they discovered that not only did he have a previously undiagnosed hole-in-the-heart that had precipitated the stroke, but also had myeloma which is a type of cancer where abnormal plasma cells develop and multiply uncontrollably in the bone marrow. It is a measure of his indefatigability that when telling me that he had family members with each of his major problems i.e. visual impairment, hole-in-the-heart and cancer, he joked that he had "copped for the lot". The cancer led to a series of chemo treatments which made him feel very unwell, and two painful sessions of bone marrow transplants. But while each did initially improve the results of the many blood tests he was having, they would simply worsen again, despite each course of treatment being more severe than the last. His treatments led to periods where he was not able to work on the cars, but he forced himself out into the garage whenever he could, even in the depths of winter.



When he got the fully painted roadster body back reassembly started in earnest and became his prime objective. He did have more help on this one, Essex Area people helped him with the wiring and screen, I had the quarterlights rechromed and rebuilt them and did work on his fuel pump and wiper motor, and a local pal helped him with a lot of odd jobs such as cleaning and painting components. But again the bulk of the work by far he did himself. He was really pushing himself as he felt that 2015 was going to be his last year of 'reasonable health' (his words), and was determined to finish the car. It all took a very long time, but by the end of June 2015 he finally got it finished to the point of getting its MOT at the first attempt, and to say he was 'over the moon' is a huge understatement. Typical of his impish humour, he sent me a photo of the MOT saying "I've just been handed this regarding the 67, can you try and work it out for me please" and it took me a moment to realise just what it

was!

At the end of July he was on holiday with his family when he was suddenly taken ill with pneumonia, rushed to hospital, where he passed away on 1st August peacefully and for the first time in a long while pain-free. It came as a great shock, we lived 150 miles apart so rarely met up in person. When I said I was going on the 100mph plus zip-wire in North Wales in May he booked as well, but unfortunately had to cancel at the last minute due to a very short-notice hospital appointment. I realised that as time went on he may not be well enough to make the trip and so was preparing to go and see him, but the end came so suddenly and unexpectedly I didn't get the chance, which I shall always regret.

Over the seven years I knew him we exchanged over 3000 emails, sometimes 20 per day, together with Skype calls and him sending me several hundred photos and pieces of video, while he painstakingly reassembled his cars and we sorted out problems together. We had many laughs along the way. Terry was the most amazing and inspiring person I have ever met, and I shall miss him. He was just 49 years old, and leaves a wife and two children aged 7 and 5.

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