



Vitesse MGBGT V8 5 speed gearbox conversion

Peter Berry explains how he considered the options when faced with his early Factory V8 gearbox starting to show signs of age and wear. He decided to go for a replacement gearbox from Vitesse. It's a Mazda 5 speed gearbox, complete with a conversion kit for use on several classics including the MGBGT V8. This is a useful story of how Peter made his decision. He has owned the MGBGT V8 for 39 years now.

In 2018 and after 45 years and 118,000 miles of reliable service the original gearbox in my early factory V8 (with overdrive in 3rd and 4th) started to show signs of age and wear. Reverse jumped out of gear, unless held in position and there were increasing metallic noises emanating from the gear lever, like rattling a bunch of knitting needles! The internals sounded 'slack' to say the least. The original basic design was on the limit with the additional torque of the V8 engine and parts are now becoming difficult to obtain, so I started to consider my options.

Rebuilding would be costly and likely to be fraught with difficulties. If successful, I would be simply rebuilding the original fragility problems back into the gearbox. Then there was the question of originality. My head was telling me that this was not the sensible way forward. I've owned the car since 1984 and I had no intention of selling it, so, although controversial, I decided that a 'better box' was needed.

Much has been written on replacement gearboxes for the MGB V8, all having their pros and cons. I considered the LT77 'box, as fitted to the Rover SD1, which is slightly slimmer but taller than the original item and hence requires some modification to the transmission tunnel. Also considered was the late R380, which is probably a better alternative but still requires similar tunnel modifications. Neither were therefore ideal. The Ford T5 'box has been widely used in North America and until recently on this side of the Atlantic, a popular choice was the Ford Sierra Type 9 gear box.

Vitesse option

Around this time a company called Vitesse Global developed an option of using a Mazda 5 speed gearbox, complete with a conversion kit for use on several classics, including the MGBGT V8. There are several advantages to the Vitesse gearbox. First it requires no modification to the transmission tunnel and it's a direct bolt in solution, with no cutting or welding needed. Second, the gear ratios are very similar (in fact, slightly better) to the original gearbox, with 5th gear being virtually

identical to 4th gear overdrive. The gear lever is a bespoke item and exits the gearbox in the original position. The only item needing alteration is the speedo, which needs recalibration. An added bonus with the brand- new Mazda gearbox is the concentric slave cylinder and remote bleeding pipe, which terminates in the engine bay. So, future clutch bleeding operations are performed from within the engine bay, rather than underneath the car. All parts are warranted for 12 months. Happy days!

This was indeed a very interesting option, so I called the guys at Vitesse and before long I was booked in for a test drive of their home-grown 3.9 V8 Roadster demonstrator, with 5 speed gearbox conversion. On arrival at Vitesse in Hinkley in Leicester the demonstrator was sitting outside waiting for me and I was soon behind the wheel. From their base the open road isn't far away and I hadn't used all the gears before I was convinced. The gear change was light and very positive, with the ratios feeling just right. Back at base, I was given a tour of the workshops and their impressive facilities, culminating in a cup of coffee in the office and a look at the Vitesse work diary.



Years ago I had access to a pit and lifting equipment but those days are sadly gone and I no longer have access to either. Vitesse provide a fitting service and so a convenient date was quickly booked.



On collection around 2 weeks later (engine out, so other minor work was attended to as a matter of common sense) I was invited to take the car for a test drive. My immediate feeling was that I had made the right choice and this was confirmed at the end of my 140-mile journey home.

So how does it feel to live with a modern 5 speed gearbox on a 1973 MGB GT V8, rather than the original 4 speed with overdrive? Well, I'm now several thousand miles into 5- speed ownership and I can honestly say that it has transformed the driving experience, without losing any of the original character of

the car, whatsoever. The clutch is light but firm. In fact, it's lighter than the original clutch and it took me a while to stop stamping the pedal to the floor on gear changes, due to the lighter feel and general driving habits with the old 'box. However, this is much better when progressing through congested traffic.

Gear ratios are an improvement

I mentioned that the gear ratios are an improvement from the original 4 speed box. This is particularly noticeable in the gap between 2nd and 3rd gears, which are much closer, giving a more linear and progressive feel through the gears. In short, it just felt right. The Mazda 5 speed gearbox feels like it belongs in the MG and I honestly believe that had this box been around when the MGBGT V8 was first conceived, it would have been the obvious choice from the outset.

	Standard MGB GT V8	Vitesse Mazda 5 Speed
1 st	3.138	3.136
2 nd	1.974	1.888
3 rd	1.259	1.330
4 th	1.000	1.000
o/d	0.820	-
5th	-	0.814

The slave cylinder is mounted within the gearbox, which makes it more difficult to get to, should any maintenance be required but modern components such as this are a lot more reliable these days and I shall worry about the consequences, should the need ever arise. If the gearbox ever has to be removed, engine removal is no longer required to split it from the gearbox.



So, in summary, my concerns about originality have long since gone. The V8 is a car for driving and if I should suddenly experience a rush of blood to the head accompanied by a desperate need to revert to the original gearbox there are no modifications to the car and so the whole Vitesse installation is completely reversible. I'm sufficiently confident that this won't happen to have parted with the old gearbox. So many people told me to keep it, just in case but in truth, I have nowhere to store it, so why? A fellow enthusiast is now rebuilding it himself to swap into his very original Factory V8. Nothing is ever wasted these days, while I look forward to many more years of happy motoring – with 5 forward gears!

Peter says if anyone else is considering this option, he will be very happy to answer any questions. As the current V8 Scribe his contacts are at the head of the monthly V8 Column in Safety Fast!