
# MGBGTV8 – concept, development & production


# Talk given by Don Hayter in 2002

# Don Hayter

- **Don Hayter** joined the design office at MG in February 1956 at a time when the MG Factory was producing MGAs. He followed this with work on the Ted Lund MGA Twin Cam Coupé for the GT class at le Mans. He stayed with MG, for much of that time as Design Engineer, right through to August 1979 when the plant finally closed following “Black Monday”.
- His experience prior to Abingdon was as an apprentice at the Pressed Steel plant at Cowley during and after the War in aircraft production design following which he joined Aston Martin, then based at Feltham in Middlesex on the west side of London.

- After leaving MG, Don was involved in creating prosthetic limbs – “I am doing that because I want to put something back into the World that gave me a good living.” That tells you something about the man!
- Key points in Don’s talk in 2002 to a group of MGBGTV8 enthusiasts from a transcript of a recording of the talk made by Victor Smith.

# Geoff Allen

**Geoff Allen** needed little introduction as he was known as a founding member of the V8 Register back in 1978 and then he had been the V8 Historian and a well-known personality within MGV8 circles. He travelled to V8 gatherings in the USA and Australia and amused many groups with his tales of his time at Abingdon and working on the MGBGTV8.

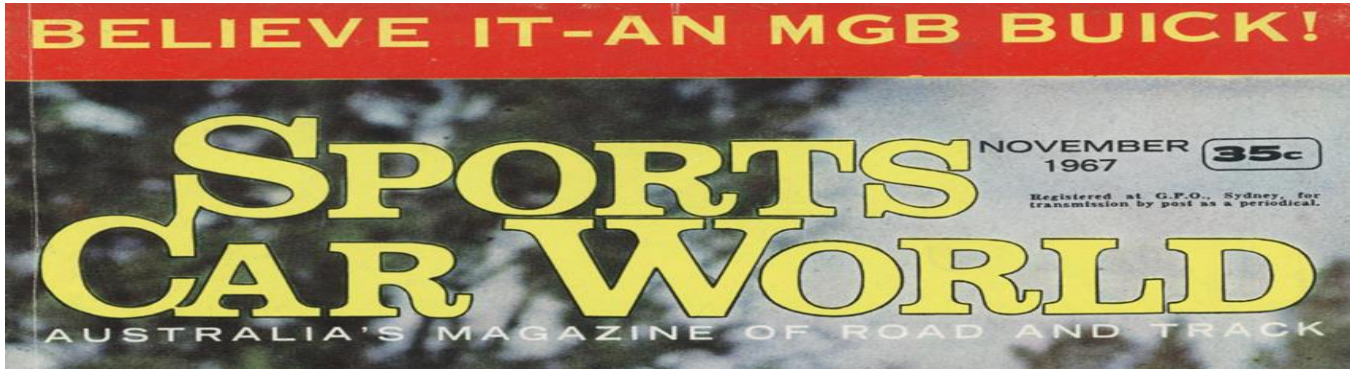
Clearly the V8 was a car which had a lasting appeal for Don and Geoff because they have both built MGBV8 Roadsters and feel the V8 powered MGB is the model they particularly enjoy!

# MGBGTV8 development programme was so damned quick!

- You had to photograph it going by! I wasn't necessarily on the production end of the programme but I was involved in much of the work on the car to do with the American market.
- When I was first asked to give this talk, I felt the question I was really being asked was "how did the base car come to be so suitable for the V8 engine?"
- Don was closely involved in the development of the MGB and then the MGBGT in the 1960s – he mentioned one feature of the MGB which would later be important for their using a V8 engine. They had **gone for a fairly wide car** because Dr Stewart, who was at Jaguar Research, was working on a V4 and V6 engine which was a possible engine for the MGB at the time. Later that was fortunately very useful in providing space for the V8 engine.

# Awareness of Costello conversions


- Then in 1971 Costello started doing the V8 conversions .
- He was using, I think, the Chevrolet engine in the early ones – buying old MGBs and putting the Chevrolet engine in.  The Abingdon team obviously became aware of that.




- **Early MGB V8 Conversion** - an Australian MGB Buick V8 in 1967.
- Barely five years after the launch of the model, an MGB with an alloy Buick V8 nestling under the bonnet appeared in Australia. The conversion was carried out by Mark Keeley, a high performance American car importer in Sydney.
- News of this remarkable MGB V8 Roadster reached MG enthusiasts in the UK **and Abingdon** and soon the idea of a V8 powered MGB became of real interest in the UK.
- Sadly the corporate politics within the BL Group at the time did not encourage the development of the MGB with the V8 engine even though it became such a successful upgrade for several Rover models.

# BL senior management finally authorised the development & production of the MGBGTV8

- But later, when the BL senior management finally saw how good an MGB with a V8 engine could be, they authorised the development and production of the MGBGTV8 model at Abingdon – but on a very tight development and production budget.
- By that time the entrepreneur Ken Costello had clearly demonstrated how successful the combination of the MGB and a light alloy V8 engine could be.
- Because of the tight availability of Rover V8 engines from their Solihull plant and Abingdon’s needs for their MGBGTV8 production were a priority, that meant engine supplies by Rover to Costello dried up!

# BL corporate politics were a damaging factor of Abingdon's development of an MGBGTV8

- Then we had acquired the Triumph management – which didn't help at all! Harry Webster (chief executive engineer at Leyland Motors) was appointed by Donald Stokes (Head of BLMC) and put in charge of Longbridge, so he had become the boss for Roy Brocklehurst and Don Hayter at MG.
- Syd Enever (chief engineer at MG) retired in the May 1971.
- First of all, Roy Brocklehurst (chief chassis draughtsman at MG) was given the job by Webster of having a "look-see" at the cost of an MGBGT with a Rover V8 engine and to see what the feasibility of the car was if the engine was available from Rover.
- Rover had been using the V8 engine for some time in their 3500 saloon and also in the Range Rover.  But there were queries over the volume availability of that engine. The most Abingdon ever got was 48 engines in a week from Rover.

# The productionising of the MGBGTV8 went ahead reasonably well through 1972

- Rover did the emission work on the engine because they were going to send it to America.  We were selling the MGB out there and because Rover were out there and because there was a service organisation out there, the obvious thing was to send the MGBGTV8 out there too.
- That meant exhaust port air injection with an extra air pump on the engine and modified carburation. Rover did six engines very quickly and when we were doing the pre-production, they built six prototype cars – I am not sure there weren't a few more than that, but we do know there were positively at least six.

# Road testing of the MGBGTV8

- Road testing of the V8 had started with Tomy Haig, who was our calibrated tester who was working with Alec Hounslow and was doing most of the driving.
- When the first V8 engines were supplied to Abingdon, they had the Range Rover carburetion system and manifold.  That meant they had a bulge in the bonnet.
- Alec didn’t like this and in conjunction with Roy fabricated an aluminium manifold and tucked it down into the Vee and turned the carburettors round closer to the bulkhead.
- We needed special air cleaners and those ends with the air temperature sensors and “claws”.

# Two other things – first gear in the gearbox and high torque on the overdrive

- If you dropped the clutch at around 3,000 rpm, there was a bang and the gearbox didn’t do any more as first gear went – it was a 17 tooth bottom gear.  So the very early cars were all changed to a 16 tooth which made that stronger.  We also put in a bigger clutch to make sure that that was alright.
- But another thing was in the gearbox - there was so much torque that it was too much in overdrive third gear. A number of gearbox issues were reported via dealers so during production the inhibiting was changed so there was only overdrive available in top gear. Change was around VIN 1260 to 1340.

# Wheels chosen for the V8


- They were “lovely alloy, steel rimmed wheels” – Dunlop composites.
- Previously used on the Scimitar with the outside a rather sharp edge although the MG version was a softer profile.
- It was the strongest MG wheel we had ever tested.

# Production lines altered for the V8

- When the MGBGTV8 came to Abingdon, of course it also did something else to us at that was we had to **alter our production lines**.
- We had four production lines downstairs and a maximum of four upstairs because we had three which would normally be MGB lines and one Midget line all the time.
- Everything was moved at Abingdon by hand, stage by stage, then dropped onto the elevated line where the axles had been prepared and engine installations were ready.
- Then the bodies would drop down for the first time onto their wheels and again manually they were pushed to the end of the line where headlamps and all the rest of it were fitted.
- That meant we had a **separate production line for the V8s**.

# But the MGBGTV8 never went to America

- That was stopped because I think Rover was pulling out of America at the same time so the service organisation wasn’t there.
- Although the V8 was clear to go to America – it had crash tested and emission tested and was ready to go if the management had said OK. But there you are.
- American regulations involved crash testing because of the raised bumper regulations.

# Very tight development and production budgets from Longbridge

- We did consider another change to the suspension but we sadly were allowed no money whatsoever for body changes – nothing at all.  That was always our trouble it was money because all production planning for changes was all done at Longbridge in the little sales office, not done at Abingdon.  It was just imposed on us.
- We used to get colour changes imposed on us and trim changes imposed on us.  We even had the radiator grille insert imposed (you remember that) from Longbridge which of course disappeared later and we went back to the MGB grille surround.


V8
V8


MGC Register
WCG 278N
VEA 191M
PVJ 414M
TNV 440N