



### How important is “originality” when MGBGT V8s are offered for sale?

Since we launched the [Pricewatch](#) series of reports of MGBGT V8s seen advertised for sale or listed for auction, our two volunteers – Keith Belcher and Andy Goves – have been beaver away spotting cars for our reports. One feature seen with many of the cars is non-original features like leather seats. Here Victor Smith considers the current situation with the **perennial question of “originality”** and whether some current buyers’ attitudes might be less concerned with non-original features.

Recently a member contacted the V8 Register seeking help with finding a pair of replacement sealed beam headlights. Whilst he acknowledged that an upgrade to domed lenses with reflectors to take halogen bulbs would have minimal visual impact on the originality of the model and the upgraded lighting would provide far better lighting for night driving, he preferred to stay with the “original equipment”. Many owners do make modest modifications or upgrades to their MGBGT V8s which are subtle with very little if any glaringly obvious visual impact on the appearance or originality. They are often made as technology has moved on from the early to mid-1970s when the model was built – electronic ignition concealed within the distributor for example or an electronic fuel pump to remove the curse of sticking points on the original pump. Currently Nic Houslip is developing an upgraded relay which will be a modern electronic relay as a compact

cube fixed within the case of an original 6RA relay for mounting on the offside inner wing. A 6RA is used for the starter motor and another for the cooling fans. Again externally that upgraded replacement will not be visible but it will be far more reliable.

With the frequency of MGBGT V8s advertised with **leather seats as an upgrade or Minilite wheels replacing the original Dunlop composites**, are V8 enthusiasts, and particularly people looking to buy an MGBGT V8 for the first time, becoming less concerned about the originality of a “Factory MGBGT V8”?

### Spread of attitudes to “originality” and modifications

It seems to me there are probably three main stances on originality:

- **Originality purists**

This type of enthusiast believes their MGBGT V8 should be exactly as it left the Factory, or as near as possible. There are inevitably issues over the lack of original replacement parts, so presumably a purist has to get “original parts” refurbished or repaired so they can continue to be used rather than fit a replacement part which whilst similar in specification and appearance has been made by another producer and possibly to a slightly different spec or appearance. Lucas parts are a frequent example.

- **Originality pragmatics**

They are substantially originality believers but with a pragmatic approach to sensible upgrades which are not glaringly obvious. This type of enthusiast usually believes upgrades like an electronic ignition system (Pertronix for example, hidden inside the distributor), an electronic fuel pump (removing the points difficulties - I defy anyone can tell the difference from the outside!), a “red rotor arm” from the Distributor Doctor (a much better quality part which is far more reliable), a cooling fans override switch (oh to be in control of cooling and when the fans come on! - just a hidden switch above your left knee), a security ignition cut-off switch, preferably a double switch which cuts the low tension supply to the coil **and** earths the circuit too), an “overdrive on” green light in the RHS of the radio console (so you can see when overdrive is engaged), a simple blade fuse on the overdrive circuit to the solenoid (located next to the hydraulics by the bulkhead), a lockable fuel filler cap, an electronic tracker fitted in the rear offside cavity adjacent to the luggage platform, lookalike Lucas domed headlamp lenses and reflectors to take halogen bulbs (an upgrade that most people would never spot if you get the real domed lenses and an upgrade which is essential if the car is to be safe driven at times when headlights are necessary), and an upgrade from twin 6 volt batteries to a single 12 volt (you only see this on the rare occasions when the access cover is off and how much better and more reliable they are too - plus fitting battery terminal clamps as a replacement for the dreaded “top hats”).

These are examples of upgrades few real V8 enthusiasts would find unacceptable. We had a substantial survey of our members on MGBGT V8 modifications and the participants ranked them to rank them in terms of popularity. See our [MGBGT V8 mods survey report](#).

- **Enthusiasts enjoying personalising their MG V8**

This category of enthusiast tends to accept the need for modifications where they help improve reliability, improve the comfort or appearance, reduce the maintenance (including time finding original replacement parts) or avoid unnecessary maintenance costs. There are many V8 enthusiasts who feel the primary aim is to ensure their car is maintained well, often on a DIY basis, so they can enjoy using their car and they also want to avoid unnecessary

expense. Modifications like front spoilers, engine bay mods, internal trim mods (typically fitting leather seats), replacement LT77 or R380 gearboxes, non-standard bodywork colours, and non-original "V8" badging or none following a restoration involving a respray are frequent examples. Typically they seem less concerned by originality puritanism and more inclined to modify or personalise their car, maybe not with overt mods like bodywork or body colour changes, but often modifications like using modern relay cubes instead of 6RA relays and alternative air filter arrangements. There are often good engineering reasons for those upgrades – for example the technology in the original 6RA relays is now showing its age and a modern electronic relay is far more reliable.

Now clearly **identifying three categories is a generalisation** as in reality many owners may aspire to originality but are pragmatic in varying degrees. But the question in the marketplace is to what extent does the value of a really original Condition 1 MGBGT V8 compare with the value of a Condition 1 car with subtle modifications or a Condition 1 car with substantial visible upgrades like leather seats? **That comparison is a test as to whether "originality" has a value.**

#### What have we seen in the Pricewatch reports?

In our [reports](#) of cars seen advertised for sale or listed for auction in 2016 I feel we have seen a **modest increase in the number of "leather seats" featured in cars offered for sale**. The number of cars with **missing or unusual V8 badging** has **increased** too. It seems that often the badging variances follow a substantial refurbishment or a restoration. Possibly obtaining spare V8 badges is the difficulty. To an informed eye misplaced or missing badging is something which is noted quite easily.

It seems that a **trend amongst some buyers is moving towards their being attracted to an MGBGT V8, or a similar classic car, simply by what "looks like a good classic car"**. Possibly as some of the potential buyers in this group are "alternative investment buyers" they simply do not know or are not aware of MGBGT V8 originality features - and even if they were, they may not be bothered if a good car has non-original features. For them the luxury of leather seats is what they feel a classic car should have.

#### Sadly such a short production run for the MGBGT V8

In the case of the MGBGT V8 model, had sales been more successful at the time it was being produced in the first half of the 1970s, it's **quite possible that later models might have had an upgraded Factory spec with leather seats**, but the plain reality is the Factory MGBGT V8s did not have leather, but a ribbed cloth seat. Sadly the production period for the MGBGT V8 was cut short because of a combination of a Middle East fuel crisis and a consequent petrol price spike plus UK domestic inflation lifting the selling price of the V8 model substantially over the short production period. Sales volume suffered badly.

#### MGs have always been modified

My personal view is that some "originality purists" may be taking originality a little too far whereas the "originality pragmatics" take a far more sensible approach. Those who have a "free for all approach to visible upgrades and modifications", whether simply engineering mods or upgrades more generally, might find that level of modification could devalue an MGBGT V8. But throughout its history MGs have always been modified by their owners. A recollection from Andy Goves, one of our Pricewatch volunteers, underlines that when he said "that in the 1970s, it was extremely popular to modify your car (irrespective of

the make) and there was a thriving retail business to support this hobby".

#### Impact of upgrades or modifications on values

The ultimate test for the impact of various upgrades and modifications on values is whether buyers will buy MGBGT V8s with substantial and visible modifications and pay good prices as though they were original or near original spec cars. Those purchases may be made knowingly or in ignorance of the "original features" of the car. The Condition 1 category with the higher prices is where the issue is seen most.

For our "condition classes" in our regularly updated [MGV8 Price Guide](#) we have at a present a **single price for a Condition 1 car** with a further category – "Exceptional" – for very good MGBGT V8s in terms of excellent condition, low mileage and a good history. Whilst we do not intend to introduce two Condition 1 classes – **Condition 1 pure** and **Condition 1 upgraded** – there are signs the two types of car are offered at prices which indicate they are classified as Condition 1. We will need to monitor the situation and see if price gaps develop between very original models and modified or upgraded cars. Our Pricewatch team will maintain a close watch over the coming months!

One thing is true: **"originality" will remain a perennial topic.**

