NEWSLETTER

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V8 Register

WELCOME TO THE V8 NEWSLETTER

2024 marks the 50th anniversary of the launch of the MGBGTV8 rubber bumper (RB) variant of the model. As mentioned last month and to mark this occasion, we are planning a display of pre-production and other notable rubber bumper MGBGTV8s at the Inter-Club international event at Malvern from Friday 28th to Sunday 30th June 2024. Getting together as many RB MGBGTV8s will be a welcome recognition of the RB model. John Davies, the owner of the 1973 Motor Show launch V8 and number 2102, one of the so-called 'pre-production' RB V8s is leading arrangements and would love to hear from you if you're interested in attending. There is a growing interest in the RB V8s, so please get in touch and bring your RB V8 to a lovely part of the English countryside at the end of June. See the 'More' webpage at www.v8register.net/more.htm for more details.

As an appetizer towards the RB anniversary celebrations, I am very grateful this month to Victor Smith for penning the following interesting history of the RB V8 model, together with further acknowledgement to the excellent information source of David Knowles' book, MG V8

Rubber Bumpers

The 'rubber bumper' home-market MGB and MGBGT came with the **'1974 ½' facelift** of the four- and eight-cylinder MGBGTs, which were on display at the 1974 Earls Court Motor Show. The driver behind the introduction of 'rubber bumpers' was the legislative power that underpinned changes to vehicle standards in the United States; from this came the urgent need for MG to meet those requirements as sales of MGs in North America were vital to the future of the MG business at that time. The way MG handled the introduction of 'rubber bumpers' to their models was both rapid and imaginative.

MGBGTV8 (Bracken 2106) on display at the 1974 Motor Show

Although at the time and for many years later 'rubber bumpers' were seen by many as a 'damaging' (even ugly) feature on an attractive classic British sports car, well known for chrome grilles and bumpers, attitudes have now changed. In recent years the combination of the relative rarity of 'rubber bumper' MGBGTV8s and the ingenious design of the bumper created by the team at Abingdon has been seen as increasingly attractive to MGV8 enthusiasts. The earlier disdain for 'rubber bumper' MGV8s, which encouraged so many owners to carry out 'chrome bumper conversions' on original rubber bumper cars, has reduced a very great deal over the last decade. Here Victor Smith looks back on how the 'rubber bumpers' for the MGB model range were developed, supplied and then introduced as a 'facelift' for the MGBGTV8 model in 1974.

US pressures to improve motor vehicle passenger safety.

In the early 1970s the legislative power that underpinned vehicle standards in the USA grew enormously, under the US National Highway Traffic Administration. (NHTSA) The key piece of legislation that seemed determined to destroy the open sports car was the Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard 208, (FMVSS 208) concerning the protection of vehicle occupants in the event of a collision. In 1972 the US Congress enacted the Motor Vehicle Information and Cost Saving Act (MVICS) which required the NHTSA to issue buyer standards that yielded "the maximum feasible reduction of cost to the public and the consumer". President Nixon explained this law in October 1972 saying "the act also authorises the Secretary of Transportation to establish cost-effective bumper performance standards for new cars manufactured in, or imported into, the United States. Since effective bumpers are key to preventing most automobile damage caused by low-speed collisions, these standards should help to ensure substantial resistance to collision damage and a significant reduction in repair costs, without compromising driver safety." Initially this led to the so-called 'Sabrina' bumper over-riders (named after Sabrina, a statuesque British actress of the time) as an option to provide impact protection.

Why were rubber bumpers fitted to MGBs and V8s?

As a major part of MGB production went to North America, this was a vital market for the Abingdon Plant and its future. With the growing concern in the USA over consumer safety and emissions legislation, MG had to comply rapidly to maintain its sales there. Starting from the 1974 model year, cars on sale in the US had to resist a level of impact damage, with tougher standards promised for subsequent years.

When MG began looking at ways to make their MGs resistant to impact damage, they looked at a range of options but an alternative to their initial option of a metal bumper system was developed. MG eventually settled upon a flexible moulded urethane bumper which quickly became

what is usually referred to as the 'rubber bumper'. They were made of Bayer's Bayflex 90 polyurethane over a steel frame and were moulded by Marley Foam, giving the completed bumper casings a semi-gloss black finish. It was very cleverly styled to sweep round the front of the MGB, minimising the visual imposition of what seemed to be a large protective lump.

The rubber bumper added 105 lbs to the weight of the MGBGTV8, a 4.3% increase on the kerbside weight. Although the 4-cylinder MGB had a raised ride height, the V8 model remained unchanged throughout production, although when the MGBGTV8 model was launched in 1973 the ride height was raised in comparison with the contemporary MGB and GT.

MG's 'Rubber Bumper'

The MG development team at Abingdon did their best to develop upgraded bumpers which would meet the US requirements, whilst minimising the damage to the classic appearance of the MGB. The early bumpers created by MG were rubber moulded over metal that were bolted through the standard chrome bumpers onto sprung steel blades, which protected the MGB well in direct front and rear impacts. Like other car manufacturers who managed to come up with arguably more elegant solutions, MG later moved on to the so called 'rubber bumpers' but had to do so at a time when they had very limited development funds from the parent company, BLMC. Detailed information on this period of passenger collision protection legislation and the response of car manufacturers, particularly those producing sports cars like MG, is covered in David Knowles' well researched book "MGV8".

"Sabrina" bumper as an early trial option fitted to an MGBGT

Recollections of Don Hayter

In his talk to V8 Register members in 2002, Don Hayter (Chief Engineer at MG) touched on this matter saying "As American regulations involved crash testing because of the raised bumper regulations which were coming in, we had started working on that and it was my job. Crash testing was one of the things that really did make a difference because we had to raise the MGB by an inch purely because the Americans designed the regulations around all the American cars, where the bumper heights were between 16 and 20 inches. Well, our poor old MGB was low, it was right down on the 16 inches and so we had to raise the car a little and make a much deeper bumper, so that in fact when they did the test on it, we could still pass.

"The alteration in fact made the MGB the first car in the world to have a built-in system which was in fact compliant with the regulations and absorbed impacts within the bumper. Everyone else, for example Volvo and BMW, had a bumper with mounted inter-rubbers and actual travel was on a large socket or a rubber dish, in fact like a shock absorber. So, the bumper actually moved, and they had to make it move under the body. We actually got compliance in the bumper itself within that polyurethane moulding.

"If anybody has been bumped in a rubber bumpered MGB then you will know how good it is. I was stopped at a T-junction, very soon after I put my own V8 Roadster on the road (which is a V8 engined MGB Roadster I built in an "O-series" shell), and by mistake the lady in front of me selected reverse gear in a Renault and came back very rapidly and hit my car, stoving in the whole of the back of her car. In fact, my bumper was somewhere about in the middle of her boot! She drove forward and came to have a look and it had only cracked my number plate and scratched the corner, but her car had about £2,000 worth of damage! Now I had seen the crash testing at the MG Plant but had never been sitting in a car and seen it happen before my eyes!"

An early pre-production chrome bumper MGBGTV8 ADO75/413 was used for test fitting the new 'rubber bumpers' and another car was subjected to impact testing them.

Blaze ADO75/413 used for an experimental fitting of 'rubber bumpers' was later sold to development employee Basil Smith

Rubber bumper facelift seen at the 1974 Motor Show

At the Earls Court Motor Show in October 1974 there was a major change – the MGB and MGBGTV8 models on display had been fitted with the new safety upgrade of rubber bumpers. The two MGBGTV8s on display were both pre-production cars (Bracken 2106 and Citron 2105) finished in bold body colours which suited the similarly bold black bumpers very well. Following the show, they were both sold on to Newbury Motors Ltd in Birmingham by BLMC Austin-Morris Publicity at Longbridge and dispatched from the MG Factory on 25th November and 2nd December 1974 respectively.

The first production rubber bumper car in 1974 was Teal Blue 2101, with the vehicle registration number TOF 560N, which was dispatched to BLMC Austin- Morris Publicity as a pre-production photographic car and a press demonstrator. It was later purchased by Geoff Allen, the foreman in the Rectifications Department for 27 years. He looked after the car for many years until his widow Jean sold the car to John Davies. It was later purchased by Jacques Milliet in Switzerland, a personal friend of Geoff for many years.

First production MGBGTV8 (Teal Blue 2101) with the rubber bumpers, as a 'facelift' launch in 1974

The other pre-development early rubber bumper cars were Harvest Gold 2102 (a press demonstrator previously owned by the late Dave Saunders in Surrey) with the VRN, DNP 229N, Mirage 2103 (advertising) with the VRN, GDA 710N and Harvest Gold 2104 with the VRN, GOL 997N.

Special Tuning's rubber bumper with an air dam

An accessory offered by Special Tuning for the MGB range became available which had a front air dam which is seen as a sensible fitment for the higher performing V8 powered MGBGT. Jeff Ward fitted the Special Tuning upgrade to his MGBGTV8 (Flamenco Red 2375) and commented "The front air dam suits the style of the black bumper cars very well and improved stability on the roads at higher speeds. There is a significant improvement in cooling from fitting a Special Tuning air dam (original ST part number STR0189, available from Moss as a 'pattern part') and from repositioning the front number plate up from its original position under the rubber bumper and on to the rubber bumper". He felt this was essential to ensure there is an unobstructed flow of air through the duct in the air dam and onto the oil cooler. He added that "In addition to reducing temperatures, the 'recovery time' down to normal running temperature after running in slow traffic is very short indeed".

Flamenco Red 2375 fitted with a Special Tuning air dam

Now we have a tale of building a 'home-grown' V8 roadster, which I'm sure a number of members have considered a similar conversion themselves.

Building a V8 Roadster

Many years ago Peter Nixon owned a Factory MGBGTV8 (Black 2293) and feels he made a big mistake by selling it. He later thought about converting his wife's 1976 MGB Roadster to V8 power as he'd built it up from a new factory shell, but his wife had said firmly 'NO!' to converting to V8 power. So in January 2017 Peter bought a rolling rust bucket rubber bumper MGB Roadster from eBay, which came without engine, gearbox, or an MOT - but lots of rust! Peter's intention was to rebuild it, convert it to chrome bumpers and install a Rover V8 engine and a five speed gearbox. Peter recently completed what became a six year project to create his V8 Roadster and here he describes the work carried out.

Rebuild and conversion to V8 power

Peter Nixon goes on to say "I mounted the Roadster on a rotisserie, stripped it down to a bare shell, cutting off the badly corroded panels, had it bead blasted to remove the remaining rust and patchy paint. Then I had it painted in acid etch paint to stop it rusting again while it was being rebuilt. The MGB front wings were in surprisingly good condition, under multiple layers of underseal, but I replaced them with new chrome bumper wings due to the intended chrome bumper conversion. Other new panels fitted included both rear half wings, scuttle, passenger and driver floors, boot floor corners, both inner and outer sills, front and rear valances and an MGBGTV8 dashboard with instruments that a Tyne-Tees member had available. I replaced the doors with American spec. MGB doors with internal side impact bracing.

A Rover SD1 3500 V8 MOT failure was bought from eBay for the engine, bell-housing and five speed gearbox, with the rest being sold to a vehicle breaker. The V8 engine was rebored, the crank re-ground, the block fitted with 9.75-1 compression ratio Vitesse pistons, a pair of Oselli gas flowed cylinder heads, a new water pump, a new oil pump and remote filter set-up, a Range Rover cam, new timing gears and chain, tubular headers, and a large bore exhaust and silencer. The original SD1 carburettors were remounted on a specially modified Range Rover inlet manifold and specially made tubular plenum provided by a Tyne-Tees member who had done a number of similar V8 conversions. With an MGBGTV8 air-box it all looks very much like the factory MGBGTV8 set-up, but it breathes better because the plenum is a bigger bore.

The MGB tunnel under the radio console was modified for the taller SD1 gear-box and the V8 engine, bell-housing and five speed gearbox installed with an MGBGTV8 differential and shortened prop-shaft. I added a new V8 radiator, a new V8 wiring harness, new brake lines and hoses, and new fuel lines throughout. A pair of refurbished Austin Princess four pot callipers (from eBay again) were fitted, with new vented discs and a new servo. Uprated lowered front springs were installed. New headlights and new backing bowls were fitted. The original bonnet and boot lid were re-used, as they were both in good condition. Because the tubular headers were

fouling the inner wings, the engine was raised a couple of centimetres; this meant a small bonnet bulge was needed - I preferred this to hammering back the inner wings.

On completion, the car passed the MOT. I replaced the 14" factory Rostyle wheels with John Brown Minator eight spoke 15" x 5.5" alloys and new tyres to finish it off. An original factory hood with a Michelotti folding frame was fitted, courtesy of another Tyne-Tees member. This makes the Roadster more usable in the winter. The Clive Wheatley big bore exhaust gives it a throaty roar and the acceleration is really quick. We had a minor problem with the brakes sticking on but that was solved by adjusting the rod between the new servo and the new master cylinder.

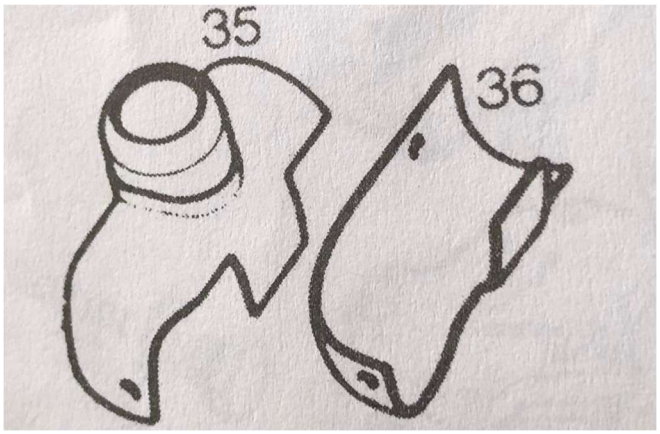
What is the result? So far the car has completed only 250 miles but I am very satisfied with the end result. One day I will put it on a rolling road to have the carburation tuned and get an HP reading at the wheels. Maybe after another year of running it and my approaching 80th birthday, I may then decide to sell it. Perhaps it will be time to start thinking of the laid back sedate comfort of the Volvo XC70 rather than the exhilaration of an MGB that blows off racy “hot hatches”!

Chilly Winter weather in Cleveland, northeast England

If Peter’s account of his home-built V8 Roadster gives you inspiration to go out there and do a similar conversion your own way, or even if this story reminds you of one you’ve already done, please get in touch, as we’d love to hear from you with and share your experiences with our fellow members. Peter just needs to replace the plastic headlamp bowls with steel ones, to permit fitting of the chrome rims. It seems that the plastic bowls don’t have the lugs for the rims.

V8 Exhaust Manifold Shrouds

The standard V8 induction set up is a complicated affair. When the car is cold, heated air is drawn into the 'lobster claws' from below, through flexible steel tubing connected to pressed steel 'shrouds' that are closely bolted around the front of the standard exhaust manifolds. Most cars have lost their shrouds over the years, either when the cast manifolds have been replaced or simply not refitted after induction system work, or they have rusted away.



Yorkshire member John Davies wanted to return his pair of V8s to the standard factory arrangement and needed two sets of shrouds. Fortunately, the uppers (BHH1297 and BHH1298) are occasionally available on eBay as New Old Stock but the lowers (BHH 1247 and BHH1248) are rarely available in good condition.

This challenge had been overcome by Paul Gill in Caerphilly in the 1980s when he restored White 2518. He created a wooden pattern former (using poor-condition lower shrouds as a shape guide) and a colleague fabricated a set.

35 years later, the wooden former was called into service again - this time loaned to Yorkshire restorer David Barber, currently recommissioning Black 2102. Turning steel sheet into a small, complex set of compound curves that emulate the original stamped component is a significant accomplishment, albeit one that most people who view the car will never see or appreciate! Regrettably the investment in time required means that no further sets are planned.