



Concerns with the relative visibility of classic cars

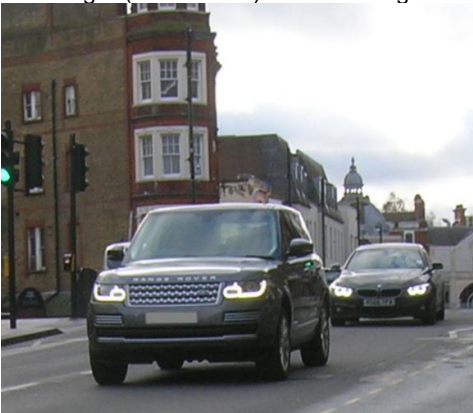
When you drive an MGV8 on UK roads today you sense that it is much smaller than many modern cars which seem to get larger and larger - not to mention the explosion of even larger SUVs and 4x4s. Modern cars also have bright daytime running lights as standard equipment, so a classic car driver naturally feels concerned their car from the 1970s is less noticeable on a relative visibility basis and consequently is aware it can be less easy to see a classic car on the road or in a rear view mirror.

Here we set out a number of the factors contributing to the **reducing relative visibility of classic cars today:**

Relatively smaller size of a classic car when compared with modern cars

To see just how much bigger a typical modern car is today we have looked at a VW Golf, the longstanding popular hatchback that has been around since 1974 and compared the most recent Golf 2020 model with an MGBGTV8 which was launched in 1973. The relative size factor has been analysed using the comparative volume and frontal area of each car.

What can we see? Well a VW Golf 2020 is now 35% larger (frontal area) and 47% larger (volume) than an MGBGTV8. Since 1974 the new VW Golf model 2020 is now 15% larger (frontal area) and 33% larger



(volume) than a VW Golf in 1974. See our report on this comparative size analysis.

[Comparative size report](#)

Major increase in the use of daytime running lighting on more modern cars and other vehicles

A classic car without similar bright daytime lighting, increasingly a standard feature with modern cars, inevitably tends to appear less visible to other drivers, so a prudent choice for a classic car driver is to use dipped daytime headlights. Some enthusiasts have gone further with modifications which retrofit Daytime Running Lights (DRLs). Our article on the daytime lighting choices for a classic car owner looks at several options.

[DRLs options for classic cars](#)

Older lighting/bulb technology tends to be used on classic cars

With original sealed beam units or headlamp upgrades with incandescent bulbs, the brightness of the headlights on a classic car can be much lower than that of most other vehicles on the road. Some classic car owners have upgraded their headlights with brighter halogen bulbs or even HIDs and have also used brighter rear stop/tail lights with LED bulbs with the aim of trying to ensure their car is more visible on the road.

[Lighting upgrades for classic cars](#)

Traffic volumes on our roads have increased in a major way over the last 10 to 20 years

The [increased traffic](#) has usually resulted in more concentrated flows of vehicles on major roads and motorways and often consequently less forward visibility of vehicle movements ahead to enable a driver to anticipate safety issues. In poor road conditions like rain with spray or in mist those risks increase substantially.

Noticeable changes in driving behaviours and styles have developed over the last 10 to 15 years

Typically we see much closer nose to tail driving habits becoming the norm. Whether this is because drivers feel modern cars are safer with antilocking brakes is not clear but closer driving is certainly seen generally, particularly when traffic volumes are moderate to high. The effect on motorways, when a driver who is close to another car ahead senses a problem and brakes so their rear stop lights come on, is you often see that **stop lights reflex is then repeated in a pulse-like manner back down the line of nose to tail cars** behind.

The effect is to disrupt the smooth flow of traffic and raise the tension in driving, but it



also tends to reduce the average cruising speed of the general mass of drivers with some drivers showing signs of frustration with the "blockage" ahead. Clearly driving close behind other cars increases the need for other cars around you to be visible – and seeing them becomes a vital safety issue.

Nostalgia for driving in earlier times

So whilst one might nostalgically recall the halcyon days when drivers in cars not then fitted with antilocking braking travelled at sensible speeds on roads and motorways in lighter traffic conditions with prudent nose to tail spacing, traffic volumes were then a very great deal lower than today. The reality is times have changed.

Similarly with vehicle lighting, the use of dipped headlights rather than simply sidelights in built up areas with street lighting has become the social norm today and regarded by many as a safer way of ensuring visibility of their car. In poor road conditions with rain and spray it is astonishing how often you see cars with no dipped headlights on. Where they have DRLs on in those conditions it is not clear whether some drivers are aware the back of their car needs to be seen by fellow drivers because with DRLs switched on most installations do not also have the rear lights on. Maybe some users of DRLs in poor conditions feel their DRLs provide good frontal visibility but they believe they do have rear lighting with DRLs and that is why they do not switch on their dipped headlights instinctively.

So **relative visibility** is an important matter for both daytime driving and driving in poor road spray and mist conditions - and the more so for classic cars for the reasons set out above.

