Which is the better choice when looking to get an MGV8 – a high priced, low mileage example or a well maintained car with a moderate mileage?

Many enthusiasts looking to buy a good MGV8 are attracted by examples in immaculate and original condition with low mileages and are less attracted by well maintained cars with moderate to high mileages. But in many ways the justification for the premium for low mileage cars can be doubtful because an MGV8 that has had such low use, sometimes with extended periods in a lay-up, can develop problems that require considerable expense when recommissioning the car, even for modest use. Also once a high priced, low mileage car is used in even a moderate way, for example 5,000 miles/pa when the recorded mileage begins to grow, the annual depreciation becomes a significant cost from an annual loss of value for the owner. This article looks at the potential maintenance outlays and other costs with low mileage MGV8s and reviews the benefits that can be had when buying a well maintained car with a higher mileage at a lower price.

What maintenance issues are seen with low mileage classic cars which have had little use?

A car that has seen little use and has stood garaged or in store for a great deal of time can develop serious corrosion on the inside of the fuel tank, clogged petrol filters, damage to aircon seals with the loss of refrigerant and a need to service brake and clutch hydraulics and seals and other components. Often you find that with mechanical items corrosion has started on for example gear teeth where the oil has drained down. This can be a particular issue where the owner has mistakenly decided to run the engine from time to time for a relatively short period which causes various chemicals and water to be deposited in the engine oil and around the engine. When the engine is run the car should be driven for a reasonable time to "boil" them out.

Earlier in 2020 just before the Covid lockdown in the UK, a member attending a classic car auction with a reduced attendance successfully bid for an early production RV8 in Exceptional condition with only 4,865 miles and in the relatively rare colour Le Mans Green. The hammer price plus commission and VAT was £25,300. That was well below the auction guide price of £23,000 to £27,000 (with commission and VAT that would be £27,140 to £31,860), so on the face of it a saving of £1,840 to £6,560 on the guide price. As the member went to collect the car to take it home he found the clutch had failed, so had to arrange for a truck to deliver the car instead. Whilst the member felt he had bought an exceptional condition car he was fully prepared and able to undertake thorough recommissioning checks and was prepared for the costs that might follow. Recommissioning a little used RV8 can cost £2,000 and even more, not unusually £5,000 plus.

Many potential buyers may not be aware that a regularly and much used but well maintained car can be better than one that has stood for extended periods of time with very little use. So a thorough inspection of a moderately used car and uncovering how it has been used during its life together with understanding the quality of the maintenance (the scope of work done and by whom) is essential.

Tyres can also an issue with some little used cars offered for sale. We occasionally see an Exceptional MGV8 advertised by "aspirant top end" traders as an example of the model in immaculate and original condition. In a few cases the "originality" mentioned in their blurb includes "original tyres more than 20 years plus old" - presumably an original feature that is something the trader feels an investor or collector must have! The fact is tyres more than 10 years old age so the rubber compound hardens and the ride becomes harsher and the braking and grip performance deteriorates. Over time side wall cracks can develop too. So hardly a desirable "originality" feature.

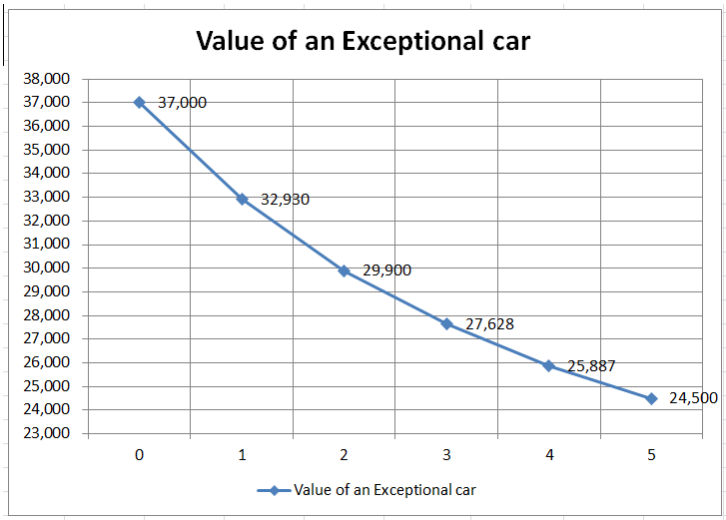
How does modest use clocking up say 4,000 miles a year affect the market value of a high priced, low mileage MGV8?

With RV8s the usual marker class is the "Condition 1" class of car which will typically have good bodywork and trim, a recorded mileage of between say 35,000 and 75,000 miles, a good servicing and maintenance record and have had regular use and dry garaging. The market in high priced "Exceptional" RV8s, usually with low or relatively low mileages, sees far fewer cars offered for sale than in the Condition 1 class. The buyers are, well just that "exceptional", with only one necessary characteristic - deep pockets. They are able to consider cars at high prices and when they wish complete the purchase as they have the funds available.

For buyers able to pay a high price for an exceptionally low mileage car but wanting an MGV8 they can use simply to enjoy life, then an "Exceptional" condition car clocking up the miles is likely to leave them with a considerable depreciation cost over the first 5 or more years of ownership. The example below illustrates this.

Assume an "Exceptional" class low mileage RV8 - purchase price						£37,000
Assume value of a Condition 1 Plus class RV8 is						£24,500
Likely reduction in value over the first 5 years						£12,500
Year end	**Annual miles**	**Mileage cum**	**Deprec'n £**	**Deprec'n %**	**Deprec'n £/mile**	**Value £**
0	0	15000	-			37,000
1	4000	19000	4,070	11.00%	1.02	32,930
2	4000	23000	3,030	9.20%	0.76	29,900
3	4000	27000	2,272	7.60%	0.57	27,628
4	4000	31000	1,741	6.30%	0.44	25,887
5	4000	35000	1,388	5.36%	0.35	24,500
	20,000		12,500		0.63	

The annual depreciation (column 4 in the table above) is considerable as the **premium for a good looking low mileage, little used RV8 is often high** simply because there are so few available in the market and they are seen as a rare item. But as modest annual use builds up, that exceptionally low mileage premium gradually falls away until by the fifth year the market value of the RV8 with say 35,000 miles, or possibly a little more, is reaching the mileage range typically seen on **Condition 1 Plus RV8s**. As the mileage builds the market value of the originally "Exceptional" RV8 will then be closer to that for a Condition 1 Plus car.



What is the effect of the recommissioning costs for a buyer?
Little used cars often need their brakes and clutch hydraulics checked for damaged rubber seals caused by inactivity and brake servo seals and in some cases the clutch may need maintenance. The aircon system often needs regassing with replacement rubber seals. In our example below the assumption is the recommissioning costs (again through lack of use) and servicing a Japan spec car with aircon can be £5,000 and the effect on the buyer's investment is to raise the purchase cost by 13.5% to £42,000.

Comparison	Purchase cost	Deprec'n	Value > 5 years	Recomm costs	Invest't net	Cost for owner
	£	£	£	£	£	£
Exceptional low mileage RV8	37,000	12,500	24,500	5,000	19,500	17,500
Condition 1 Plus RV8	24,500	-	24,500	-	24,500	-
Difference	12,500				- 5,000	

The impact on the value of the buyer's investment in the originally low mileage Exceptional RV8 is considerable.

Buyers with more modest budgets, and who are better prepared when looking for an RV8 to buy, may realise that a well maintained RV8 with 40,000 to 80,000 miles is not something to cringe away from but in fact is likely to be a car in better mechanical and electrical condition from regular use **plus** the purchase cost as a Condition 1 Plus car is much lower. So overall that car could be much better value for money and after the first five years they will often have a better investment.

Buying an Exceptional MGBGTV8 – a member's experience
In this case our member had bought a low mileage MGBGTV8 which had been in storage for many years and was recommissioned for sale. His experience adds a slightly different twist to the costs that can arise: the **quality of the remedial or recommissioning work is key factor**.

In 39 years the car had covered only 31,000 miles with most of them in the first three years. There were lots of receipts for work done and new parts. A new fuel tank and an Aldon ignition upgrade were two good things, but then there was a catalogue of horrors:

- **Fuel pump** was a replacement but was neither new nor an MG unit, and it failed.
- **Windscreen wiper motor didn't park and was single speed**. It was piece of junk simply added to make the wipers work.
- **Tyres** were fairly new, but were Chinese and provided little grip.
- **Rear number plate lights** had been put on the wrong way round and shone towards the car behind. Fortunately there was no expense in fixing that one.
- **Heater controls** on the dashboard moved, albeit slowly, but they weren't connected to anything, just stiff in the Bowden cable.
- **Heated rear window** appeared to work – but it didn't. A sneaky electrical leak allowed the warning light to come on when the switch was on, but no demisting was available. No cost to fix, it just needed to remake some earths.
- **Front shock absorbers** were semi-seized. The car didn't bounce at the front the way it normally would with bad shockers as their semi-seized nature made them feel quite firm.
- **Front suspension** was heavily packed with grease, but was right on the MOT acceptable limit according the tester. A full front end rebuild followed.
- **Ignition** (apart from the Aldon unit) gave a lot of trouble. It now works well, but there are very few original parts left.
- **Twin SU HIF carburettors** needed a complete rebuild which was undertaken by a local garageman.
- **Hazard warning switch** was in a bad way.

Fortunately the bodywork was in good condition as the car had been stored in dry conditions. Some of the snags were clear to me at the time I purchased the car but others were not. Would an engineer's inspection report have helped? In some areas it would, but not in all of the cases that were subsequently uncovered.

Our member feels the moral of the story is: **just because someone says it has been recommissioned, don't expect it to be either complete or to a high standard**.

Which is the better choice when looking to get a good MGV8?
For enthusiasts looking to get a good MGV8 there are essentially three purchase options:

- **Exceptional condition example** which is usually at a higher price and often with a low or relatively low mileage. Where they have low mileages inevitably they will have seen little use and often they will have been in storage. Many will have had little prudent maintenance like firing up the engine and giving the car a good 20 minute run. If the car is on a SORN then that will limit access to public roads for a run and if the "maintenance procedure" is simply to run the engine for 10 minutes then the moisture in various parts will not be boiled out with the corrosion consequences highlighted above. If the buyer intends using the car a great deal the depreciation cost in addition to the recommissioning costs can be considerable.
- **Condition 1 example,** which often will have an annual mileage of around 2,500 to 3,000 miles so in the region of 90,000 to 120,000 miles for an MGBGTV8 and 50,000 to 70,000 miles for an RV8, and available at lower prices. The good examples, with evidence of thorough and regular servicing and maintenance, the need for recommissioning costs should be relatively low and similarly annual depreciation. Often they are the best value for money.
- **Condition 2 example** which will often need some maintenance and refurbishment and with MGBGTV8s, often more serious restoration if the buyer wants to move towards Condition 1. For a buyer, a very careful and thorough inspection of the vehicle is vital to ensure more serious restoration work is not needed.
- **Condition 3 example** will usually involve serious restoration work involving either personal time and costs or engaging a specialist restorer. The costs are considerable and in many cases the resulting value does not recover the buyer's outlay.